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An Investigation of the Association between Secrecy Characteristics, Trust, and the Reasons Romantic Partners Report for Discussing Expectations Regarding Secrecy

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An Investigation of the Association between Secrecy Characteristics, Trust, and the Reasons Romantic Partners Report for Discussing Expectations Regarding Secrecy

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Dedication

To Jerrod. You are my love. Thanks for the companionship during this wild process in this concrete jungle.

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An Investigation of the Association between Secrecy Characteristics, Trust, and the Reasons Romantic Partners Report for Discussing Expectations Regarding Secrecy

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The decision of romantic partners to share or keep a secret involves each partner's perception of the other's trustworthiness. Indeed, trust may influence how romantic partners enact secrecy in their relationship. This study investigated the willingness of individuals to keep secrets from their partner, the number of secrets that people keep from their partner, individuals' reports of their reasons for discussing their expectations regarding secrets, and the association between each of these characteristics and partners' trust. First, the literature regarding secrecy and people's willingness to keep secrets from a relational partner is investigated. People's willingness to keep secrets from a relational

partner should differ based on their trust in the partner. Secret holders are more likely to disclose to a confidant when they perceive that confidant to be trustworthy (Kelly & McKillop, 1996) and, conversely may not disclose to a confidant who lacks trustworthiness (Wheeless & Grotz, 1977). In light of these findings, it was expected that individuals' willingness to keep secrets would be negatively related to the degree to which they trusted their partner. In a similar vein, the association between trust and the frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy was explored. The literature suggests two possibilities for the association between trust and the frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy. The first is that individuals who trust their partner enough may decide to discuss how secrets should be managed, because dyadic trust is associated with increased intimacy of disclosure (Larzelere & Huston, 1980). The second possibility is that people may choose to discuss their expectations of how they should manage secrets, not because of trust, but because a lack of trustworthiness. Research questions explored the associations between the frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy and partners' willingness to keep secrets, the number of secrets they keep, and their trust. Finally, the reasons why individuals might or might not discuss their expectations regarding secrets with their partner, and what these discussions might consist of were explored.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The extent to which individuals trust their romantic partners has important implications for how they manage secrecy in their relationships. For this reason, the current study investigated the possible associations between trust and various aspects of romantic partners' secrecy. It focused on individuals' willingness to keep secrets from a romantic partner, the number of secrets that they keep from the partner, the frequency that they have discussed secrets with the partner, and their reasons for discussing or choosing not to discuss their expectations regarding secrets. Studying these characteristics and their possible associations with trust is important for three reasons. First, it contributes to increased understanding of why romantic partners keep secrets from each other. Second, it addresses why individuals may choose to discuss rules and expectations regarding the secrets they share with a partner. Third, it extends the notion of boundary management processes and allows for empirical testing of the association between the frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy and trust between dating partners.

This investigation will increase researchers' understanding of why romantic partners keep secrets from each other. Researchers have speculated on the role of trust with regard to the willingness to keep secrets, but have yet to investigate it. One reason that individuals keep secrets from others is that there is an inherent risk in telling someone the secret information (Bok, 1983; Petronio, 2000). It is likely that individuals' perceptions of risk are lower when they trust a partner. If this is the case, individuals

should be more likely to tell secrets to partners they trust. Risk has been defined as "a condition in which the consequences of a decision and the probabilities associated with the consequences are known entities" (Baird & Thomas, 1985, p. 231). Researchers have argued that only risky situations call for individuals to trust (Deutsch, 1958) and that trust is needed only in cases of perceived risk (Boon & Holmes, 1991). Presumably, individuals will perceive less risk in telling a secret to someone they trust, and may therefore tend to keep fewer secrets from that partner.

The present study aimed to analyze the reasons that individuals have for choosing to discuss or not discuss their expectations regarding management of secrets with a partner. Exploring these reasons qualitatively allowed for an investigation of what drives individuals to communicate with a partner in order to better manage secrets within romantic relationships. Such an exploration could shed light on what reasons for discussing expectations with a partner are the most salient to individuals. Furthermore, because individuals may have different reasons for avoiding this type of verbal interaction (Afifi & Guerrero, 2000), the current study analyzed reasons that individuals have for choosing to not discuss their expectations with a partner regarding secrecy management. For example, because dating couples are sometimes uncomfortable discussing topics that involve relationship norms or rules, some partners may avoid discussing these topics (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004). Similarly, individuals may fear the possible negative impact on their relationship of discussing norms and expectations with their partner (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985).

The current study also investigated how dating partners manage secrets within relationships. It extended communication privacy management theory (Petronio, 1991, 2002) by exploring how the frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy for romantic partners relates to trust. It is unclear how the frequency of dating partners' discussions regarding secrecy expectations may be associated with trust. A review of the literature suggests two contradictory predictions: (a) frequently discussing expectations regarding secrets may be positively associated with partners' trust, and (b) frequently discussing expectations regarding secrets may be associated negatively with partners' trust.

If frequently discussing expectations is positively associated with individuals' trust in a dating partner, then this research will provide empirical evidence that follows much of the previous self-disclosure literature, which suggests that trust begets self-disclosure (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Indeed, individuals are more likely to discuss relationship issues with a partner they trust (Hardin, 2001; Holmes, 1991). These discussions may help maintain people's trust in the partner by revealing and confirming expectations, and when individuals affirm that their partner is trustworthy, they may become closer (Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999). Additionally, having trust in a partner suggests that individuals believe that their partner has their best interests in mind. This belief may encourage people to discuss their expectations to further clarify their interests or any rules regarding secrets. Clarifying individuals' interests could make it easier for the partner to meet the individuals' expectations regarding how to handle secrets and may therefore increase the likelihood that the partner will remain trustworthy.

Alternatively, it could be that partners frequently discuss their expectations about a secret because they lack trust in the partner and are worried that the partner will share the secret with others. For example, Petronio and Bantz studied verbal strategies that people use to raise issues about norms and rules regarding secrets. Labeled *prior restraint phrases*, (i.e. "Don't tell anyone but…"), these verbal strategies are employed to control the access of others to secrets (Petronio & Bantz, 1991). Presumably, when partners feel the need to use prior restraint phrases it is because they are concerned about the partner disclosing a secret or because they lack trust in the partner, but researchers have yet to investigate whether this is the case. People who use prior restraint phrases or feel the need to discuss their expectations regarding secrets with their partner, may fear that their partner will share their secrets with others. By contrast, individuals who trust their partner have little need to fear that the partner will not cooperate with the norms of the relationship (Das & Teng, 1998) and may be less likely to worry their partner will disclose their secrets.

Frequently discussing expectations regarding a secret may function as a boundary process that helps individuals manage privacy in interpersonal relationships (Petronio, 2002). Thus, the current study will increase our understanding of how privacy management systems are enacted in dating partners' relationships, and how dating partners' secrecy management attempts may be associated with perceptions of trust.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

CONCEPTUALIZATION

The following section describes conceptualizations of the variables in the present study on secrecy and trust. The section opens with an explanation of the three most common definitions of secrecy. Then it chronicles how the literature has conceptualized trust of a romantic partner.

Secrecy

On the importance of secrets in close relationships, Imber-Black asserts that "Secrets are born, draw breath, stay alive, explode, or resolve in our most meaningful relationships" (1998, p. 9). From previous studies of family secrets (Vangelisti, 1994), secrets in friendships (Rawlins & Holl, 1987), and openness between dating partners (Rubin, Hill, Peplau, & Dunkel-Schetter, 1980), it is clear that individuals in close relationships use secrecy to maintain privacy (Petronio, 1991) and to protect the status of their interpersonal relationships (Kelly & McKillop, 1996; Vangelisti, 1994).

Secrecy often is conceptualized in one of three ways: as a subset of private information; as separate from privacy, based on who has "the right" to know the information and the social distance between the individuals involved; and as the act of purposefully blocking information from others. Communication privacy management theory treats secrets as a subset of private information (Petronio, 2002). Petronio argues that any information kept from others is private information, and that private information

involves varying degrees of risk (2002). According to this conceptualization, secrecy can be likened to privacy and deception, as each are attempts to limit the flow of information (Parks, 1982). For example, an individual may conceal an extramarital relationship in order to limit the number of people who perceive that they "co-own" that information (Petronio, 2002). Keeping a secret, then, functions to limit others' access to information. Petronio also asserts that only information that is considered high risk is conceptualized as a secret (Petronio, 2002). Proponents of conceptualizing secrets as a subset of private information further argue that perceived risk differentiates secrets from private information and that secrets, then, are kept from others because disclosing them would entail high amounts of risk (Imber-Black, 1998; Petronio, 2002).

There are two problems with using this conceptualization of secrecy. Researchers have argued that defining secrets as private information is problematic because not all secrets are about private, personal information (Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2009). Some secrets are kept from others (i.e., birthday presents) and do not carry much risk (Caughlin, Afifi, Carpenter-Theune, & Miller, 2005). Petronio's conceptualization can also become problematic because secrecy and privacy are terms that often "overlap" (Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2009), and the difference between privacy and secrecy is not clear to most people who keep secrets (Imber-Black, 1998). For example, Vangelisti (1994) found that participants reported that they kept secrets because they felt the information was private. Likewise, individuals sometimes protect themselves and justify not telling others by claiming that information is private (Imber-Black, 1998).

A second conceptualization of secrecy emphasizes that secrecy differs from privacy based on who has the right to the information in question (see Bellman, 1981; Kelly, 2002). In this view, information is considered secret due partly to the manner in which it is communicated, and to whom it is disclosed (Bellman, 1981). According to Bellman (1981), individuals do not have the right to know private information, but they may have the right to know secrets. Bellman defines roles in terms of "social distance" (1981, p. 4) and argues that social distance determines whether an individual has a right to certain information held by others. According to this conceptualization, intimacy affords an individual the right to information about the other. A secret "concerns information that the other person may have rights to, but that the possessor chooses, is told to, or is obligated to withhold" (p. 4). The content of any information can be "made into a secret" (p. 1) based on how the information is told to others and based on the level of social distance involved.

When one contends that a certain piece of information is deemed a secret, due to an assumed or normative social distance between two people (e.g., a mother and daughter), Bellman's conceptualization may be problematic. Sometimes the social distance that people assume defines a particular relationship will not reflect individuals' experiences in that relationship. For example, a mother and daughter who do not consider themselves close, might have a different idea than what norms would suggest of what information is secret.

Another problem with Bellman's conceptualization is the assertion that only individuals in intimate relationships tend to disclose secrets, and that normally,

individuals would only keep a secret from an intimate partner (Bellman, 1981). This is an important problem because the conceptualization does not address the possibility that an individual could attempt to keep a secret from everyone—strangers and intimate partners alike. Individuals can also think they are keeping a secret but be unaware that others already know the secret because it was disclosed through a third party, or in the case of HIV, through visible symptoms of the virus (Greene & Serovich, 1996).

Individuals also can share secrets because they feel they have a duty to do so; such is the case with sexually transmitted infections (Derlega, Winstead, Mathews, & Braitman, 2008). Greene and Serovich argue that people living with AIDS often perceive that they have a duty to tell sexual partners that they are HIV positive (1996). Under Bellman's conceptualization of secrecy, these examples would be considered private information rather than secrecy. Thus, characterizing secrecy based on how and to whom information is told may be problematic.

A third conceptualization of secrecy focuses on individuals' decision to keep information from others. The act of keeping secrets has been defined as intentionally blocking information from others to prevent others from knowing or revealing the information, thus exhibiting power over the information (Bok, 1983). In this conceptualization, secrecy is a form of self-concealment (Bok, 1983), which has been defined as "the predisposition to actively conceal from others personal information that one perceives as distressing or negative" (Larson & Chastain, 1990, p. 440). Individuals can intentionally block information from others in several ways: they can prevent others from seeing or hearing evidence of the information; distract others from the existence of

the information; disguise the information; or simply verbally withhold the information from others (Bok, 1983).

In this third conceptualization of secrecy, Bok notes that the word "secret" is derived from a Latin word *secretum,* which originally meant "to sieve." According to Bok (1983), an individual sieves through his/her thoughts to purposefully decide what will be made public to others, and what will be concealed from others. Although Bok uses the metaphor of a sieve to describe the experience of keeping secrets (1983), the sieve metaphor is limited unless one addresses who might be holding the sieve. Others sometimes have the power to decide whether the secret holder's secret will be disclosed. When the secret holder either tells others the secret or is unsuccessful at blocking the information from others, the secret holder has less power over what happens to that information (Bok, 1983); this is because any individual who knows the secret is a "co-owner" of that information (Petronio, 2002). For example, an individual might attempt to keep a secret only to find that the secret has been "outed" to others without his/her consent (Hunt & Paine-Gernée, 1994; Imber-Black, 1998; Karpel, 1980).

For three reasons, the proposed study will conceptualize secrecy using Bok's (1983) definition of secrecy. First, the definition avoids the classification of secrecy as negative (Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2009); this is important because secrets can be positive (Caughlin et al., 2005) and have positive functions in relationships (Vangelisti, 1994). Second, according to this definition, information can be both private and secret, secret but not private, or private but not secret (Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2009). A broad conceptualization like Bok's circumvents problems with classifying information as either

private or secret based on the content of the information, the perceived risk involved with disclosing the information, and who acts as the confidant. Third, in order to categorize the information as a secret, Bok's (1983) definition uses the perception of the individual carrying the secret (Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2009); this is important because the current study will focus on the perspective of the individual, and individuals' perceptions (i.e., of the number of secrets, the willingness to keep secrets, and why partners discuss expectations regarding secrecy) should influence their relationship. For example, researchers looked at family secrets and found that the perception that an individual's family keeps more secrets in comparison to other families is inversely associated with family satisfaction (Caughlin et al., 2000; Vangelisti, 1994).

Trust in a Romantic Partner

Two processes involving trust occur between secret holders and their confidant. The first involves characterization of an interaction as trusting. This characterization depends, in part, on the presence of risk. Individuals do not need to trust a partner with low-risk information because there is no risk if that partner decides to share the information with others. It is only when individuals disclose high-risk information to a partner that the interaction is characterized as trusting. The interaction is considered trusting because in disclosing high-risk information, secret holders perceive risk. A degree of perceived risk on the part of secret holders is necessary in any given interaction in order to characterize the disclosure as a trusting act.

The second process involves the perception that a partner is trustworthy, which may decrease secret holders' perception of risk (Holmes, 1991). Trust involves making oneself vulnerable to a relational partner (Jones & George, 1998; Kee & Knox, 1970; Pearce, 1974; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). Likewise, individuals' trust in a partner decreases their perceptions of risk in the romantic relationship (Holmes, 1991). The paradox of disclosing secrets to others is that the only way to know for sure whether a confidant is trustworthy is by first giving him or her a chance to hold risky information. When individuals are unsure of another's trustworthiness but disclose a secret anyway, they incur a certain amount of risk (Holmes, 1991). Indeed, one could argue that any disclosure of a secret involves risk, regardless of the perception of trust in the confidant, because secret holders cannot keep the confidant from sharing the secret with others (Petronio, 2002).

The trust that one romantic partner has in the other is important to study because the perception of whether a partner can be trusted impacts interpersonal relationships. Researchers have suggested that relational satisfaction (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Bradbury & Fincham, 1988; Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1976), longevity of relationships (Altman & Taylor, 1973), depth of intimate self-disclosure (Larzelere & Huston, 1980), privacy boundaries (Petronio, Martin, & Littlefield, 1984), and partners' motivations to remain in a relationship (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985) are all influenced by trust.

Holmes (1991) argues that individuals' cognition regarding a partner, including their trust of that partner, influences how individuals perceive their partners' behaviors. People who have high trust in a partner (a) do not readily question the partner's motives

for his/her actions; and (b) do not let a single negative event with the partner color the overall perception of that partner, but instead interpret the negative event with other events that have occurred throughout the entirety of the relationship (Holmes, 1991). Individuals with high levels of trust also transform negative information about the relationship and the partner into positive information (Holmes, 1991). Researchers have found that rather than rejecting information, people tend to incorporate inconsistent information into their perception of the other partner (Chaiken & Yates, 1985). Turning negative information into positive attributes allows individuals to sustain positive perceptions about the relationship (Murray & Holmes, 1993) and about the responsiveness and trustworthiness of the partner (Holmes, 1991). Trust, in this way, acts to buffer negative events from impacting individuals' perceptions of the partner.

One reason that individuals who have high trust in a partner do not readily question the partner's motives and interpret negative events with other events that have occurred is that high-trust individuals, in part, rely on their sense of their partner's perception of the relationship's importance (Holmes, 1991). When individuals trust a partner, they believe that the partner "is intrinsically motivated to care" and will be responsive to their needs (Holmes, 1991, p. 73). Additionally, high-trust individuals sense greater confidence that the partner will be there for them (i.e., is reliable) and cares for them more than do those who have less trust in their partner.

Researchers have argued that trust is based on knowledge of a partner and being able to predict what that partner will do over time (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Hardin, 2001; Kerr, Stattin, & Trost, 1999; Rempel, Holmes & Zanna, 1985). Individuals' trust in a

confidant is built through reassurances, which means that whenever a confidant treats the individuals' secrets with discretion individuals are more likely to trust that confidant further (Kydd, 2000). Dating partners may also use knowledge to gauge what behavior their partner will enact by observing how the partner handles other people's private information. For example, individuals could know of past secrets involving their romantic partner and could feel that the partner will act in a responsible manner with their secrets (Kerr et al., 1999).

Literature on self-disclosure and secrets suggests that trust begets self-disclosure (Altman & Taylor, 1973), and while some situations undoubtedly call for secrets to be shared with a confidant who may lack trustworthiness (Caughlin et al., 2005; Vangelisti, Caughlin, & Timmerman, 2001), it is argued in this dissertation that the number of secrets that individuals keep from their partner will be negatively related to the level of trust they have in that partner. A discreet partner is less likely to disclose others' secrets, regardless of relationship consequences (Bok, 1983).

RATIONALE

With the aforementioned variables conceptualized, the following section builds the argument for investigating three characteristics of secrecy: people's willingness to keep secrets from a relational partner; number of secrets individuals keep from partners; and romantic partners' discussions of their expectations surrounding secrets.

Willingness to Keep Secrets

The willingness to keep secrets varies from individual to individual and situation to situation (Larson & Chastain, 1990). People are more likely to report that they would keep a secret if they fear negative evaluation from others (Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997) or disapproval from others, (Vrij, Nunkoosing, Paterson, Oosterwegel & Soukara, 2002), or in cases of individuals withholding relational complaints, if they fear that the potential confidant will react with anger (Afifi, Olson, & Armstrong, 2005). Individuals also tend to keep secrets from responsive confidants less frequently than from unresponsive confidants. Partners who are unresponsive do not employ nonverbal and verbal immediacy cues and tend to foster environments that secret holders may deem unsafe or inappropriate for disclosure (Jones & Wirtz, 2006).

Researchers have argued that the willingness to keep a secret is influenced in part by whether individuals perceive that certain criteria to reveal a secret have been met (Afifi & Steuber, 2009). In other words, when individuals perceive that the situation or the confidant does not meet enough of their prerequisites to reveal, they tend to keep the secret. For example, individuals who have a willingness to keep certain kinds of secrets

may do so because three criteria for potential confidants—lack of judgment of the secret holder, discretion, and ability to offer new insight (Kelly, 2002)—are not met. Because of the close association between individuals' willingness to keep secrets and their criteria they use to disclose secrets, these criteria will be used in the current study to assess on aspect of people's willingness to keep secrets.

In many cases, dyadic trust may act as an indicator of individuals' willingness to keep secrets. For example, researchers have found that dyadic trust is positively related to intimacy of self disclosures (Larzelere & Huston, 1980). Trust also may influence the perception of which information should and should not be shared with a partner (Hardin, 2001). Researchers suggest that secret holders are more likely to disclose to a confidant when they perceive that confidant to be trustworthy (Kelly & McKillop, 1996) and conversely, that they may not disclose to a partner they perceive lacks trustworthiness (Wheeless & Grotz, 1977). In a recent study, having trust in the confidant was a frequently cited reason for disclosure among same-sex friends; among dating partners, 20% of participants reported that trust was central to disclosure (Derlega et al., 2008).

However, secret holders' perceptions regarding a confidant's trustworthiness do not ultimately dictate decisions about whether to keep a secret from a confidant. Vangelisti et al. (2001) provide support for this claim. In their study, Vangelisti et al. (2001) found that relational security, a variable that is similar to trust, was not by itself a "deciding factor in participants' considerations about whether to reveal their family secret" (p. 18), but rather was a "minimum criterion for revealing family secrets" (pp. 22-23). People tend to keep information from individuals who they do not know well enough

to trust (Ullmann-Margarlit, 2004). Also, secrets are often told with the expectation that the confidant is trustworthy and will not divulge the secret to others (Bellman, 1981). Indeed, Vangelisti et al. (2001) found that some participants reported that it was necessary to trust a confidant more before they would reveal some types of family secrets. However, some secrets are perceived to be highly stigmatizing by the secret holder, and in these cases, individuals may keep these types of secrets, even from those they trust most (Major & Gramzow, 1999).

Low levels of trust may also influence individuals' assessment of the risk associated with disclosing a secret. For example, when individuals perceive that disclosing a secret is risky, they feel vulnerable (Petronio, 2002) and this vulnerability can vary based on the level of risk tied to revealing a secret. Recently, researchers developed the risk revelation model (Afifi & Steuber, 2009) and argued that individuals' assessment of risk associated with disclosure of a secret in part determines "readiness" or willingness to reveal a secret (p. 148). Afifi and Steuber (2009) extended communication privacy management theory (Petronio, 1991, 2000, 2002) to reason that low levels of trust of a potential confidant will result in a high assessment of risk and a lack of "readiness" to disclose the secret, and will influence the permeability of privacy boundaries between the partners.

One obvious strategy that people can use to decrease their vulnerability is to avoid telling secrets to their partner. Individuals who are trying to decrease their vulnerability will tend to alter their privacy boundaries to become more impermeable, a practice that is part of a process referred to as closing a self boundary (Petronio, 2002). This implies that

the individuals shut off disclosure to their partner. The behavior includes not sharing personal information, including secrets, with the partner (Petronio, 2002). Considering the implications that trust may have on the willingness to keep secrets, the following hypothesis is advanced:

H1: There will be a negative association between individuals' levels of trust in a partner and the individuals' willingness to keep secrets from a partner.

Number of Secrets

It may not merely be the willingness to keep secrets that is associated with trust, but also the number of secrets that individuals keep from a partner. This section reviews the literature regarding the number of secrets that individuals keep in interpersonal relationships. The review is limited by the fact that the majority of secrecy studies focus on characteristics of a specific secret rather than the number of secrets kept by individuals. The number of secrets that individuals keep has been explored in marital and family relationships, but not in dating relationships.

When the number of secrets has been explored, participants have been asked to report an estimate of the number of secrets in their relationship (Caughlin et al., 2000; Vangelisti, 1994). These studies have examined the associations between the number of secrets kept and relational satisfaction. One study found that family members' perception of the number of secrets being kept in their family did not significantly vary in different family configurations, and that the number of secrets they perceived was negatively related to their satisfaction (Caughlin et al., 2000). Likewise, it has been found that

individuals' perception of the number of secrets that their family held in comparison to other families was related to family satisfaction (Vangelisti, 1994).

There may also be a reciprocal effect when it comes to the number of secrets kept in romantic relationships. For example, people may tend to keep more secrets from a partner who they perceive is keeping secrets from them (Finkenauer & Hazam, 2000). Individuals' use of secrecy (i.e., avoiding a topic) has been positively related to marital satisfaction, while the perception that the partner used secrecy (i.e., the suspicion that the partner was withholding information) has been negatively related to marital satisfaction (Finkenauer & Hazam, 2000).

There is reason to argue that trust will be associated with the number of secrets kept from a partner. First, since individuals tend to reveal secrets to partners they trust (Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993), and trust appears to be a minimum criterion for revealing family secrets (Vangelisti et al., 2001), individuals who trust a partner should keep fewer secrets from that partner. When individuals are comfortable sharing most secrets with a partner they are probably less likely to deem revealing information to that partner as risky. It may be the case that people find it necessary to keep more secrets from a partner that they lack trust in because they perceive that telling the secret would incur too much risk. The partner could attempt to harm individuals by using the secret against them. (e.g., the partner could tell the secret to others without the secret holders' permission). People may have low levels of trust in a partner because they fear the possibility that the partner will reveal secrets with the intent to harm or be exploitive.

Individuals who lack trust in a partner may visualize how that partner might act if entrusted with secrets and may, as a consequence, opt to keep secrets. If individuals keep secrets from a partner on a regular basis, they are likely to have a relatively large number of secrets.

H2: There will be a negative association between individuals' levels of trust in their partner and the number of secrets kept from that partner.

Discussing Expectations Regarding Secrecy

It is unclear what association trust has with partners discussing how to manage secrets within their relationship. This section explores two possibilities based on the extant literature. The first possibility is that discussing the individuals' expectations of secrets is associated with trusting a partner. The second possibility is that people tend to discuss expectations about secrecy in cases when they have low levels of trust in a partner.

The first possibility is suggested by the finding that dyadic trust is associated with increased intimacy of disclosure (Larzelere & Huston, 1980). Dyadic trust is characterized as a person's belief that a partner has his/her best interests in mind (benevolence), and that the partner is honest (Larzelere & Huston, 1980). Researchers have found that dyadic trust was positively associated with depth of self-disclosure, and that this association was stronger in more committed relationships (Larzelere, & Huston, 1980). Given this finding, partners involved in relationships characterized by relatively high levels of trust may be likely to disclose their secrets and talk about expectations

regarding these disclosures, whereas those involved in relationships that are characterized by relatively low trust may refrain from such intimate disclosures.

Trust has been described as essential to disclosure (Karpel, 1980), and as a necessary but insufficient condition of disclosure (Wheeless & Grotz, 1977). According to social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973), relational partners disclose increasingly more intimate information over time as they build trust in each other. Following this logic, individuals who trust a romantic partner may decide to share secrets with the partner and describe to this partner their expectations regarding who should be able to know the secrets.

It may be that romantic partners' discussions of their expectations for managing secrets help secret holders limit others' access to the secret. Some dating partners may tell each other their expectations for secrecy because even though they trust each other, they may disagree about how secrets should be handled (Petronio, 2002). There is evidence that dating partners often need to adjust their rules for secrets because they come from different families with varying rules for disclosure (Petronio, 2000). Partners may violate each others' secrecy expectations and have disagreements regarding these expectations. Discussing these expectations may function to limit or identify possible disagreements between partners.

Individuals also develop rules to guide disclosure in close relationships, and these rules become more important as the relationship develops (Argyle, Bond, Iizuka, & Contarello, 1986). In relationships with relatively high levels of trust, partners may benefit from helping each other to successfully follow relationship rules. For example,

discussing expectations about disclosure of secrets makes individuals' expectations explicit to their partner—effectively "drawing a line in the sand" that, if crossed, entitles secret holders to characterize the act as a betrayal of confidence (Rawlins & Holl, 1987). However, explicit expectations may not always be effective in limiting disclosure. For example, when people simply tell their partner not to tell others, this does not stop the partner from revealing the secret to those outside the relationship (Petronio & Bantz, 1991).

The second possibility is that partners may discuss expectations about secrets because they have low trust in the partner. Individuals who lack trust in their romantic partner are left with relatively few options for disclosure: They can disclose their secrets and remain hopeful that the partner will not relay those secrets to others outside of the relationship; they can keep their secrets from that partner; or they can make explicit their expectations about how the partner is supposed to treat the information and then tell the secret to that partner. It may be that when individuals reveal a secret to an untrustworthy partner, they will first attempt to make explicit to that partner their expectations of what should happen to the secret. Although there is reason to think that this practice is ineffective at keeping a confidant from revealing secrets to others without permission of the secret holder (Petronio & Bantz, 1991), people may still attempt these discussions.

While discussing expectations about secrets may clarify what each partner's responsibilities are to the other when a secret is revealed, a partner may still "out" a secret without permission (Petronio, 2002). In other words, making expectations about secrecy clear to the partner does not always effectively stop the partner from sharing the

secret with others. Petronio and Bantz (1991) found that simply telling the partner not to share the secret with others was not an effective deterrent. Also, the behavior of a partner who a secret holder does not trust may influence the effectiveness of making expectations explicit in the relationship. Untrusted partners are not by nature cooperative (Gambetta, 1988) and tend not to follow established rules in interpersonal relationships. These partners often are not trusted for good reasons—because they have exhibited behaviors that warrant low levels of trust (Holmes, 1991). For example, an untrustworthy partner often betrays a secret holder and that secret holder's trust by outing secrets, and a history of erratic or unpredictable behavior may erode established trust (Holmes, 1991).

Although discussing expectations regarding how secrets are managed may not be effective (Petronio & Bantz, 1991), individuals may still use these discussions to attempt to avoid possible betrayal by a partner (Ullmann-Margalit, 2004). People may not trust their partner and may decide to make their expectations explicit before telling the partner a secret. Having a plan or an expectation of what should be done with secrets within the relationship may offer both partners an idea of how much secrecy they expect, and it might quell uncertainty about a partner's future actions especially if, in the past, that partner has acted irresponsibly with the other partner's secrets.

Given the uncertainty as to why partners may discuss explicit expectations regarding secrecy, the following research questions are posited:

RQ1: What is the association between the frequency with which individuals discuss how to manage secrets and individuals' trust in their partner?

Frequently discussing expectations regarding secrets may also be related to the willingness to keep secrets from a partner. From a review of the literature, it is unclear if discussing expectations regarding secrets and the willingness to keep secrets from a partner are associated positively or negatively. Individuals who tend to keep secrets from a partner may be less likely to discuss expectations about managing secrets. Perhaps these individuals attempted to discuss expectations regarding secrets in the past, but their attempts backfired. After several failures, these individuals may choose to not discuss their expectations regarding secrets in the future. In fact, they may also start to close themselves off (Petronio, 2002) and decide to keep more secrets from their partner.

It may also be that people who tend to keep secrets from a partner frequently discuss expectations about secrets. For example, individuals may keep the secret that they once had an intimate relationship with the partner's best friend, and at the same time, make their expectations about secrets explicit to the partner. This discussion may be a way for people to maintain control of their secrets (Petronio, 2002). Individuals sometimes use a discussion of a topic related to their secret to gain information from a partner (Baxter & Wilmot, 1984). For example, an individual could keep a bank account secret from his or her partner and try through conversation to coax the partner to discuss expectations about the subject (how they expect one another to treat finances).

It remains unclear whether those individuals who are more likely to keep secrets are also more or less likely to frequently discuss their expectations with a partner regarding secrecy. Given this, the following research question is advanced:

RQ2: What is the association between the frequency with which individuals discuss how to manage secrets and individuals' willingness to keep secrets from a partner?

Two possibilities are suggested regarding the association between the number of secrets kept from a partner and frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy. First, it may be that individuals who keep a large number of secrets from a partner will be more likely to discuss their expectations with their partner regarding secrecy because they find these discussions salient to outcomes of disclosing their secrets. For example, people could use discussions regarding their expectations of secrecy with a partner (Petronio & Bantz, 1991) to check their perceptions about what their partner thinks about secrets (Baxter & Wilmot, 1984). These discussions might allow individuals to safely seek information regarding how the partner will treat their secrets before deciding to reveal a secret to that partner. Likewise, individuals who keep a small number of secrets from a partner might be less likely to frequently discuss secrets because in the past, the partner exhibited behavior that has characterized him/her as trustworthy, and as having discretion. When this is the case, people may have less of a need to use a discussion to test what their partner will do with the secret once it is revealed because (a) they are confident that the partner is acting with their best interests in mind (Larzelere & Huston, 1980), and (b) the partner has most likely been cooperative in the past (Gambetta, 1988).

The second possibility is that individuals who keep a large number of secrets from a partner will be less likely to frequently discuss their expectations regarding secrets because they may find it difficult to discuss secrets with a partner (Kelly, 1999). These

individuals may choose not to discuss the norms surrounding their secrets for fear that such a discussion will suggest that they keep a large number of secrets from the partner. Similarly, it could be that individuals who keep a small number of secrets from a partner will be more likely to discuss expectations regarding secrecy in the relationship because they tend to be open with their partners—not much is kept from the partner (Rubin et al., 1980). Because they are relatively open, these people may feel comfortable being explicit about their expectations about secrecy. Given that there are two competing possibilities regarding the association between the number of secrets kept from a partner and the frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy the following research question is posited:

RQ3: What is the association between the frequency with which individuals discuss expectations regarding secrecy and the number of secrets that individuals keep from a partner?

Reasons for Discussing Expectations Regarding Secrecy

It is also unclear what reasons participants have for discussing how to manage secrets with their partners. Examining the reasons that individuals report for discussing their expectations regarding secrecy will help researchers to better understand the verbal messages individuals employ to manage secrets within romantic relationships. Knowing more about individuals' reasons for discussing expectations regarding secrecy—and reasons individuals opt not to discuss their expectations regarding secrecy—will set the

stage for future studies to examine possible associations between those reasons and disclosure decisions, as well as the characteristics of various secrets.

Although the reasons that individuals have for discussing secrecy expectations have not been systematically studied, researchers have discussed the expectations that secret holders have of confidants. These expectations offer some preliminary evidence about why individuals might discuss their expectations about how secrets should be managed within the relationship. First, because secret holders expect discretion from confidants (Kelly & McKillop, 1996; Petronio & Bantz, 1991), they might want to clarify to the partner that the secret should not be shared with others. Individuals sometimes expect that confidants will be responsible with their secrets (Petronio, 2000), that confidants will treat secrets with discretion and trust (Derlega et al., 1993), and that the information they disclose to confidants will be kept confidential (Argyle & Henderson, 1985). Having these expectations, however, does not ensure that a partner will be aware of these expectations or cooperate with the secret holder. Sometimes secret holders find it necessary to discuss (Petronio, 2002) or impose sanctions (Petronio & Bantz, 1991) in order to restore control over their information when the confidant tells others the secret. In other words, in order to make sure their expectations are not violated, individuals might discuss with partners who should (and should not) be told the secret.

Second, discussing expectations might help people to better predict a potential confidant's behavior after the confidant is told the secret. Individuals have certain expectations regarding their partner's behavior when the partner learns about their secret(s). Secret holders sometimes anticipate that their partner will use the secret against

them, that the partner will be angry with them (Vangelisti et al., 2001), that the partner will evaluate them negatively (Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997), or that the partner will treat them differently than before the secret was revealed. Even though some researchers have argued that secret holders are inaccurate in predicting the reactions of confidants and the outcomes of revealing a secret (Caughlin et al., 2005), this inaccuracy might not keep secret holders from attempting to predict how a potential confidant will respond. Individuals reported that they accurately predicted the consequences of revealing secrets to their partner, even though they were inaccurate (Caughlin et al., 2005). If secret holders perceive that they are good at predicting what might happen when they reveal a secret, they may use discussions about their expectations to aid them in predicting their partner's reactions to a secret.

A third reason for discussing expectations regarding secrets may be that people gain knowledge of how much secrecy their partner uses. Researchers have found that the perception of the number of secrets that individuals keep from partners is associated with those individuals' relational satisfaction (Caughlin et al., 2000), and so individuals might discuss their expectations regarding secrecy in an attempt to learn whether a partner is equally sharing his/her secrets (Petronio, 2002).

Fourth, individuals might discuss expectations regarding secrets to learn a partner's rules regarding secrecy (Petronio, 2002). Individuals come to romantic relationships with their own sets of expectations regarding secrecy (Petronio, 2000), and they may find it helpful to learn their partner's expectations to avoid conflict or misunderstandings with their partner.

A fifth explanation for discussions regarding secrets may be to navigate novel circumstances (e.g., career change, new work environment, changes in community standing). Novel circumstances may necessitate changing the rules for secrecy, and people may want to negotiate these changes with their partner (Petronio, 2002). Individuals' expectations regarding the management of secrets develop out of interactions with a partner (Petronio, 2002), so it follows that individuals might use discussions to negotiate changes regarding new acquaintances who are not allowed access to secret information.

Sixth, individuals might discuss expectations regarding secrets in order to obtain their partner's advice or to gain a new perspective on secrecy (Kelly & McKillop, 1996). People who see their partner as responsive and supportive (Derlega et al., 1993; Greene & Serovich, 1996) may discuss secrets with their partner because they anticipate the discussion will be helpful.

A seventh possible reason for these discussions is that they may allow individuals to confirm their perceptions of a partner through that partner's feedback in a process called social validation (Derlega & Grzelack, 1979). For example, individuals could navigate whether they trust their partner (Holmes, 1991) or decide on a course of action (Derlega & Grzelack, 1979) by obtaining information regarding a partner's beliefs about secrecy within the relationship.

An eighth purpose for discussing expectations regarding secrecy may be to demonstrate power (Bok, 1983). Individuals sometimes are able increase their perception of power within their relationship by granting their partner access to information or by

using coercion to attempt to control the disclosure of secrets within, and outside of the relationship (Bok, 1983).

The norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) is a ninth reason for discussing expectations about secrecy. Individuals may talk about their expectations in an effort to match or reciprocate what their partner has already disclosed.

Finally, disclosure of intimate information is sometimes influenced by conversational appropriateness (Derlega & Grzelack, 1979). People sometimes share intimate information just because it is conversationally appropriate (Derlega & Grzelack, 1979; Vangelisti et al., 2001), or because there is an opening in the conversation (Dindia, 1982).

To begin to understand why individuals might discuss their expectations regarding managing secrecy with their romantic partners, the following research question is forwarded:

RQ4: What reasons do individuals have for discussing their expectations regarding secrets with their partner?

The reasons that individuals do not discuss their expectations regarding secrecy with their partner have not systematically investigated. When individuals talk about their expectations these conversations may be similar to conversations regarding relationship talk. The literature suggests that individuals sometimes avoid talking about the relationship because doing so might have implications for the state of the relationship. When individuals discuss how they want a partner to better manage secrets, their efforts may backfire and signal that they do not trust their partner. This might have implications

for the state of the relationship. For instance, when dating partners discuss secrecy expectations the discussion might make one or both partners uncomfortable, and may make them refrain from having the same discussion in the future. Further, they may perceive this type of discussion as off-limits if they feel that having the discussion will bring the status of the relationship into focus (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985). Likewise, talking about topics that point to faults in the partner, to his/her inability to keep secrets, or to a lack of discretion, may change either or both partners' positive outlook to an outlook that is more negative regarding the relationship (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996).

Although there are several reasons given in the literature for individuals to discuss their expectations regarding secrets with partners, it is uncertain what reasons individuals may have for not discussing expectations regarding secrets with a partner. In order to further explore why individuals might not discuss their expectations the following research question is advanced:

RQ5: What reasons do individuals have for not discussing their expectations regarding secrets with their partner?

Communicative Strategies for Discussing Expectations Regarding Secrecy

Other than prior restraint phrases (Petronio & Bantz, 1991), it is unclear how individuals communicate with a partner regarding expectations of managing secrecy. Although the conversations used to manage secrecy have not been researched, much information can be gained from reviewing how partners may coordinate boundary ownership using the framework of Petronio's (1991) communication privacy

management theory. According to communication privacy management theory, individuals believe that secrets, once disclosed to a partner, are co-owned (Petronio, 2002). For example, once an individual reveals a secret to a partner, that individual expects the partner to cooperate with the individual's wishes. The individual, rendered vulnerable to the actions of the partner, may attempt to control the boundaries for the secret by coordinating expectations for secrecy (Petronio, 2002). Partners may explicitly establish rules for managing the secret via discussion. Under this theory, there are four categories that impact how partners communicate with each other to coordinate boundaries: boundary linkages; boundary ownership; prior restraint phrases; and boundary sanctions.

Boundary linkages. In these discussions it is possible that individuals may address their level of commitment to coordinate the rules regarding the secret (Petronio, 2002). An individual may argue that the partner is obligated to keep the secret based on whom the secret is about. This is what communication privacy management theory refers to as establishing a boundary linkage (Petronio, 2002). Boundary linkages describe how individuals are privy to information—they are the connections that define why an individual is allowed to hear the secret. Several rules establish boundary linkages and seem to influence the choice to disclose to certain people: rules about confidants; rules about timing; and rules about topic (Petronio, 2002). Individuals are more likely to form linkages (disclose) to confidants who fit certain criteria. For example, level of intimacy between partners can in part, help an individual to decide whether to disclose to or form a boundary linkage with a partner. Linkages then, can reflect the degree to which the ties

that bind the partners are strong or weak. The strength or weakness of ties between partners is important because it may impact expectations for managing secrecy. For example, individuals who have strong ties with their partners often expect a higher level of obligation on the part of partners to manage secrecy.

The goal of individuals when establishing boundary linkages may focus on setting up or increasing the partners' sense of accountability and responsibility for the secret. Individuals can check to see whether the partner is feeling obligated to keep the secret, by using communicative strategies to probe, by asking direct or indirect questions about the secret, or seeking information about the partner's feelings or attitude about the secret (Petronio, 2002). It is possible that linkage rules that individuals have employed could be apparent in conversations. For example, individuals may reveal why they are discussing the secret or why they are choosing to explicitly manage the secret with the partner. They may say, "I'm telling you because I trust you" or "I tell him everything because I am close to him" or "we should discuss how to handle this because we are dating."

Boundary ownership. A discussion may also include communication attempts by an individual to establish clear rights and responsibilities for each of the partners regarding the secret. This type of communication essentially establishes the boundary lines for each of the partners regarding disclosure of the secret and is referred to as boundary ownership in communication privacy management theory (Petronio, 2002). Boundary ownership is defined as the process by which rules help determine the borders of the boundaries (Petronio, 2002, p. 105). Boundary ownership defines the rights and privileges individuals perceive that they have and other accord them as co-owners. When

individuals reveal secrets to their partners, the boundary shifts to include that partner. Individuals then, are tasked with defining to the partner who should be allowed to hear the secret. This is where a partner may need to identify the boundary lines. According to Petronio, (2002) there are at least three strategies present in conversations that establish boundary ownership.

First, individuals might attempt to clarify boundary ownership through communication attempts which define the boundary line—that is communicate exactly who should and should not be told the secret (Petronio, 2002). For example an individual might say, "I do not want Paul to know about this." Additionally, the confidant might attempt to show that he or she is loyal or trustworthy or that he or she is invested enough in the secret in order to change the perception of the partner regarding their ownership of the secret. For example the confidant might say, "You know that I will keep the secret. I promise I won't tell. You can count on me."

Second, individuals may attempt to communicate that the boundary ownership is not static and that special care needs to be taken to not reveal a secret to others unless it is the right time. An individual might attempt to impress the importance of timing of disclosure to third parties by saying, "Wait until October to tell your father that we are dating okay? I don't want him knowing until then."

Third, individuals may attempt to establish congruity in the boundary ownership by telling the partner that they want to collectively determine who is in and out of the border. For example, "Should we tell your co-workers or just your mom?" or "we should talk about who in our circle of friends should get to know the secret."

Boundary permeability. Boundary permeability defines the degree to which others have access to secrets (Petronio, 2002). Boundary permeability reflects how open or closed the boundaries to a secret are. In a conversation to manage secrecy, partners may attempt to impart a certain degree of permeability by using what has been identified as a prior restraint phrase (Petronio & Bantz, 1991). Such phrases may include "I don't want you to tell anyone about this" or "That night was embarrassing and I haven't even told my roommate, don't tell anyone. Okay?" Or, partners may co-create a level of permeability by coming to an agreement during the course of the conversation. For example, a partner might conclude "This should just stay between us" or "it shouldn't be anyone else's business what happened that night."

Boundary sanctions. Boundary sanctions are a method of holding a partner accountable for breaches or violations of boundaries (Petronio, 2002). In a conversation individuals may establish sanctions, "If you tell Joan about this, I will never tell you another secret ever again!" Sanctions are important to managing secrecy because they might help individuals to reassert their ownership of a secret. Another method of employing sanctions on a partner is when an individual strategically brings up the partner's past mistake or betrayal. For example, "I can't believe you told Tristan about the money I stole! Now, I'm probably going to get fired!" or "Why did you tell Susan about how much I make at work? I wish you wouldn't have told her that." These types of sanctions often embarrass or reprimand the partner for violating the boundaries and may function to reestablish or further define the rules for secrecy in romantic relationships (Petronio, 2002).

In order to explore how conversations about expectations regarding secrecy unfold in romantic relationships, the following research question is posited:

RQ6: What communicative strategies do individuals attempt while discussing how to manage secrets?

Chapter 3: Methods

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were recruited in three different ways. An e-mail that described information about the study was sent to students enrolled in undergraduate Communication Studies courses at a large southwestern university. The call for participants was announced on the research web page for Communication Studies. Also, fliers in the Communication Studies Department and in student dorms were used to recruit potential participants.

Many courses in the Communication Studies Department have opportunities for students to participate in research for extra credit points, and this research served that function for the participants. People who opted not to participate in the current study were allowed to sign up for an alternative extra credit project. No participants decided against completing the study once they started to participate in the study. The human subject involvement in the project began after IRB approval was obtained in June of 2010 and ended before the end of the fall semester.

Eligible participants were at least 18 years old and currently involved in a romantic relationship. There were 147 female, and 60 male participants. One respondent failed to report his or her gender. Participants were 54.1% White/Caucasian; 6.3% Black/African American; 16.8% Hispanic/Latino/a; 19.7% Asian/Pacific islander; and 2.9% other. One participant chose not to disclose ethnicity.

The age of respondents ranged from 18 to 35 years (M = 20.75; SD = 2.64). Relationship length with romantic partners ranged from 1 to 122 months, averaging 22.24 months (SD = 22.30). Of the total, 12.6% of participants reported they were casually dating their romantic partner, 81.2% were exclusively dating, 2.9% were engage and 3.4% were married, and 1 participant failed to report relational status. Among respondents, 11.2% reported that they were cohabitating with their romantic partner. Participants reported that they had contact with their romantic partner frequently (46.4%), pretty often (16.8%), more often than not (20.2%), middle (9.1%), sometimes (6.3%), a little (1%) and never (0%) (M = 5.85; SD = 1.32). Participants reported how often that they had seen or had contact with their romantic partner and this ranged from .03 days to 7 days out of the week (M = 5.19; SD = 2.10).

PROCEDURE

Two-hundred and eight participants completed a questionnaire for extra credit in lower division communication courses at a large southern university. Individuals came to a data collection site on campus and completed a questionnaire. Participants first were asked to read a cover letter describing the research and to sign a consent form if they had decided they wanted to be involved in the study. They had the opportunity to read a statement about the purpose of the study, a description of any foreseeable risks or sources of discomfort, and a statement indicating that participation was voluntary, and that refusal to participate would involve no penalty or loss of benefits to the participant (see consent form).

Participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to explore how individuals in romantic relationships keep secrets from partners, examine how partners manage expectations regarding secrecy, and assess individuals' trust of their partners. Participants were instructed to read the following background information:

> Sometimes partners decide to keep information from each other. This is called secrecy. For the purpose of this study, a secret is any information that you *intentionally* block from your partner. The secrets you keep can be positive or negative. When answering the following questions, think of the relationship that you currently have with a romantic partner. This partner can be someone you are casually dating, exclusively dating, cohabitating with, or to whom you are engaged or married.

Individuals were asked for demographic information as well as information about their relationship, including relationship length, status (casually dating, exclusively dating, engaged, or married) and frequency of contact. Questionnaires required approximately 50 minutes to complete.

MEASURES

Trust

Participants completed the dyadic trust scale (Larzelere & Huston, 1980) to assess the degree to which they trust their partner. Larzelere and Huston have argued that trust is dyadic, that it is conceptualized as existing "to the extent that a person believes another person (or persons) to be benevolent and honest" (p. 596). This differs from Rotter's notion of generalized trust, which is a person's belief about the trustworthiness

of others in society (1967). The dyadic trust scale has high construct validity because of its association with love, self-disclosure, and commitment (Larzelere & Huston, 1980).

Larzelere and Huston (1980) constructed the eight-item dyadic trust scale from items used in previous research that measured various types of trust, and then adapted those items to apply to dating and marital relationships. Items are rated by participants on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 *(strongly disagree)* to 7 *(strongly agree)* and consisted of the following: "My partner is primarily interested in his/her own welfare"; "There are times when my partner cannot be trusted"; "My partner is perfectly honest and truthful with me"; "I feel that I can trust my partner completely"; "My partner is truly sincere in his/her promises"; "I feel that my partner does not show me enough consideration"; "My partner treats me fairly and justly"; and "I feel that my partner can be counted on to help me" (p. 599). In previous studies the dyadic trust scale has had a reliability of .93 (coefficient alpha). Larzelere and Huston (1980) also found a low correlation with social desirability (r = .00, n. s.) and generalized trust scales (Rotter: r = .02, n. s.). Cronbach's alpha of the dyadic trust scale in the current study was 0.88. (M = 5.47; SD = 1.10; 1 *(strongly disagree)* to 7 *(strongly agree*).

Number of Secrets Kept from a Partner and Description of Secret

The number of secrets that participants keep from their romantic partner was assessed with the item "How many secret that you would consider important, are you currently keeping from your partner? If you are not sure please give an approximate number." Participants' reports of the numbers of secrets ranged from zero to fifteen (M =

2.42; *SD* = 1.78). (To gauge the participants' perception of the number of secrets they keep in relation to other individuals, participants were also instructed to think of other romantic couples that they know and to respond to the following question: "Would you say that you keep fewer or more secrets from your partner than other individuals might keep from their romantic partners? (*M* = 3.02; *SD* = 1.47; 1 (*much fewer*) to 7 (*much more*). The instructions then said, "In this sections, we would like you to recall and describe one important secret that you are currently keeping from your partner. This secret can be positive or negative. Be sure to describe what the secret is about." The participants then answered the question, "Why are you keeping this secret?"

Willingness to Keep Secrets

The willingness to keep secrets from a partner was measured using a scale adapted from Vangelisti et al. (2001). The original items from the Vangelisti et al.'s (2001) scale assessed criteria for revealing secrets across 10 underlying dimensions: (a) intimate exchange (e.g., "If my partner had a similar problem I would reveal the secret" or "I would tell if my partner and I were having a 'heart to heart' discussion"); (b) exposure (e.g., "I would tell my partner if he/she confronted me about the secret"); (c) urgency (e.g., "I would tell my partner if I needed someone to confide in"); (d) never (e.g., "There is no chance I would ever reveal the secret to my partner" or "No matter what, I will keep the secret from my partner"); (e) acceptance (e.g., "I would reveal the secret to my partner if he/she wouldn't disapprove of me after hearing it"); (f) conversational appropriateness (e.g., "I would reveal the secret to my partner if it seemed

to fit into the conversation"); (g) relational security (e.g., "I would tell my partner if I had a more intimate relationship with him/her" or "If I trusted my partner more than I do now I would reveal the secret"); (h) important reason (e.g., "I would reveal the secret to my partner if I thought it was essential for him/her to know" or "If a crisis arose that necessitated my revealing the secret to my partner, I would tell"); (i) permission (e.g., "I would tell my partner if my family members thought it was okay to tell"); and (j) family membership (e.g., "I would reveal the secret to my partner if he/she were going to marry into my family") (Vangelisti et al., 2001 pp. 14 -15). (M = 3.70; SD = 1.10).

Afifi and Stueber (2009) used a modified version of Vangelisti et al.'s measure of criteria to reveal secrets, selecting items from three different dimensions of the criteria, to assess people's willingness to disclose secrets in three separate contexts. For the purposes of the current study, the scale used by Vangelisti et al. was adapted in three ways. First, because the original (2001) scale was developed to measure the criteria individuals used when deciding whether to disclose family secrets, each item on the scale contains the word "relation." In the present study, the word "partner" or "friend" was substituted for the word "relation." Second, rather than treating each of the 10 dimensions as separate scales and investigating the criteria and their associations with other variables, this study initially employed the scale as a unidimensional measure to investigate participants' willingness to keep secrets from their partner. Participants' scores on each of the items in the scale were summed and averaged across the 10 dimensions. Then, in order to explore the possibility that participants' willingness to keep a secret could be characterized by underlying factors, the 10 separate dimensions were examined. Third, the current study

focused on peoples' tendency to keep secrets rather than disclose secrets so the willingness scale items were recoded so that a high score reflects individuals' tendency to keep secrets rather than disclose secrets. A higher total score on this scale indicated a higher willingness to keep secrets from their partner. Prior to completing the revised questionnaire, participants read the following instructions: "Think again about the secret that you just describe. This secret should be the one that you noted above. For each of the following, indicate from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) the extent to which you agree with each statement."

Frequency of Discussing Expectations Regarding Secrecy

Participants were asked to read the following background information:

> Romantic partners sometimes decide to talk about what they expect each other to do with information that they don't want spread to others outside of the relationship.
>
> For the purpose of this study, a discussion between partners about secrecy expectations is any discussion that you have with your partner that includes:
>
> talking about who should/shouldn't be allowed to hear secrets or talking about rules you or your partner may have regarding secrecy. We are interested in how often you might talk with your partner about managing secrets. On a scale of 1 (*Never*) to 7 (*Always*) indicate how often you have the following types of conversations with your partner.

Respondents then completed a series of items designed to assess the frequency with which they discussed their expectations about secrecy. Items included "My partner and I talk about whether we expect certain information that we tell each other should be kept secret from others", My partner and I talk about our rules when we share a secret

with each other"; and "My partner and I tell each other who should or should not be told our secrets." The frequency score represents how often participants engage in discussions of expectations with their partner. To calculate the frequency, the score on each of the three items was averaged. Lower scores indicate a relatively low frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy with a partner, while higher scores represent a relatively higher frequency of discussing expectations with a partner. Cronbach's alpha of the frequency of discussing expectations scale in the current study was .84. (M = 3.99; SD = 1.53; 1 (*Never*) to 7 (*Always*).

Reasons for Discussing Expectations Regarding Secrecy

In the current study, participants were asked to explain why they did or did not discuss their expectations about secrets with their partner. Specifically, each participant had the opportunity to answer four open-ended questions. Participants were told, "We are interested in why you might or might not talk with your partner about managing secrets." Then the participants were instructed to consider instances when they discuss their expectations about secrecy with their partner and to describe why they do so. Participants also were asked to think about instances when they do not discuss their expectations about secrecy with their partner and to describe why they do not do so.

The secrecy literature suggests that the reasons individuals have for discussing and not discussing how to manage secrets probably differ. It is possible that each participant might have instances in which they choose to discuss and other instances in

which they choose not to discuss, therefore the participants were given the opportunity to answer both open-ended items. The instructions to participants for the next item read, "Sometimes these discussions about secrecy management are an opportunity for partners to tell each other who should or shouldn't be allowed to hear the secret." Next, the participants were asked to describe why they discuss with their partner who should or shouldn't be allowed to hear their or their partner's secrets. Then, participants were asked to report why they do not discuss with their partner who should or shouldn't be allowed to hear their or their partner's secrets.

In order to analyze the content of these interactions between partners, the final segment of the questionnaire consisted of an item which asked participants to recreate a conversation with their partner in which they discussed rules about secrets, or who should or should not be told a secret. There were three follow-up items to allow participants to further explain and amplify their recall of the conversation (e.g. the location that the conversation took place, what happened before the conversation took place, what happened after the conversation took place). This strategy has been used on previous studies that asked participants to recall a conversation (Vangelisti, Daly, & Rudnick, 1991).

Chapter 4: Results

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

In order to analyze the associations between variables in the current study, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used. Prior to conducting the main analyses, correlations were run to investigate the associations between a number of demographic variables and the variables of interest in the study. These correlations were used to determine if there were any variables that should be controlled in the main analyses (see Table 1). The analyses suggested that the demographic variables of age, sex, and ethnicity were not related to reports of dyadic trust, frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy, number of secrets, or willingness to keep a secret from a partner, and thus, they were excluded from further analyses. Relational length was significantly associated with participants' reports of their willingness to keep a secret from a partner (r = -.16; $p < .05$), and frequency of contact was significantly related to trust (r = .14; $p <$ .05).

A series of regressions was conducted to address H1, RQ1, and RQ2. The variance inflation factor and the tolerance of each of the independent variables were examined to ensure that there were no problems with multicolinearity. The highest variance inflation factor was 1.02, and the lowest tolerance level was .98, indicating that multicolinearity was not an issue. Pearson correlations were conducted to test H2 and RQ3.

Dyadic Trust and Willingness to Keep Secrets from a Partner

A hierarchical regression was conducted in order to assess whether there was a negative association between individuals' levels of trust in their partner and their willingness to keep secrets from their partner (H1). Because relational length was significantly correlated with willingness to keep secrets from a partner, it was controlled for statistically by adding it to the regression equation in step 1. Trust was entered in the equation in the second step and was not significantly related to willingness to keep a secret from a partner (F [1, 202] = 2.54, *ns*). Results suggest that when trust was added to the model in step 2, it did not account for a significant amount of variance in willingness to keep a secret from a partner (R^2 change = .00, F change = .009, *ns*). Table 2 contains the standardized beta weights and the R^2 change for each step of the equation.

To explore the possibility that participants' willingness to keep a secret could be characterized by underlying factors, the items composing this measure were submitted to a principle components factor analysis with varimax rotation. An examination of the eigenvalues that emerged from this analysis indicated that a 10-factor solution was optimal. Two items (Heart-to-Heart and Really Intimate Conversation) were dropped due to double loadings. [1] The final factor solution accounted for 78.5% of the variance and is illustrated in Table 3. In the final solution, the factor previously identified by Vangelisti et al. (2001) as Urgency was combined with Important Reason. A new factor, which was named Help and Comfort, emerged. The items that made up each factor were summed and averaged to create subscales.

[1] When factor loadings differed less than .2 they were defined as double-loaded.

Following Vangelisti et al. (2001) the first factor was named Exposure (M = 2.86; SD = 1.64). Items composing this factor focused on the likelihood that individuals would keep their secret if they were confronted with someone who knew or suspected the secret. The second factor was named Urgency and Important Reason (M = 2.72; SD =1.50). This factor included items that tapped the likelihood that individuals would keep a secret if they felt there were problems associated with the secret, and if these problems got worse. The Urgency and Important Reason factor also involved items that assessed whether participants experienced a pressing need to disclose the secret to the partner. Acceptance was the label for the third factor (M = 3.00; SD = 1.92). Items included in this factor focused on whether individuals would keep a secret if they perceived that their partner would not attack or judge them. The fourth factor was named Never (M = 5.34; SD = 1.77). This factor was made up of items that reflected circumstances in which the participants would never tell the secret, or that nothing would make them reveal the secret. The fifth factor, labeled Relational Security, (M = 4.96; SD = 1.90) included items focusing on the degree to which participants' trust in their partner or assurance that the partner would not tell the secret to others would influence the likelihood they would keep a secret from the partner. Permission was the name of the sixth factor (M = 5.08; SD = 1.63). This factor included items that tapped whether participants would keep a secret from the partner if family members, or the person who was the focus of the secret, gave the participants permission to reveal the secret. The seventh factor, labeled Intimate Exchange (M = 2.98; SD = 1.66), included items that focused on the participant's tendency to keep the secret from the partner if the partner first told the participant about a

similar story, a similar problem, or if the partner should know the secret so that he/she did not feel alone. The eighth factor was named Conversational Appropriateness (M = 4.60; SD = 1.87). This factor was composed of items that reflected the likelihood of keeping the secret from the partner if the secret fit into conversation, or when it was considered appropriate to reveal the secret during an interaction with the partner. The ninth factor was labeled Help and Comfort (M = 2.69; SD = 1.73). Items included in this factor focused on the likelihood of keeping the secret from the partner if the participant felt that knowing the secret would either help or comfort their partner in some way. Finally, the tenth factor was called Family Membership (M = 4.02; SD = 2.30). This factor included items focusing on the likelihood of keeping a secret from the partner if the partner married into the family. The alpha reliabilities for these subscales are reported in Table 3.

To further explore H1 five hierarchical regressions and five simple linear regressions were conducted (see Tables 4-6). In each of the first four hierarchical regressions, relational length was controlled for by entering it in the first step of the equation because it was significantly correlated with each of the dependent variables. [2] In the fifth regression, frequency of contact was controlled for in the same manner because of its significant correlation with the dependent variable. In order to test the remaining associations between variables, five simple linear regressions were conducted.

[2] Specifically, relational length was significantly associated with Relational Security (r = -.25; p < .001), Intimate Exchange (r = -.18; p < .01), Conversational Appropriateness (r = -.16; p < .05), and Family Membership (r = -.17; p < .05).

In the first hierarchical regression, trust served as the independent variable, and Relational Security was the dependent variable. [3] Because it was significantly correlated with Relational Security, relational length was controlled by entering it in the first step in the equation. Trust was entered in the second step in the equation. As can be seen in Table 4, trust was significantly associated with Relational Security (F [1, 202] = 12.22, p < .001), and after controlling for relational length, it accounted for 11% of the variance in Relational Security (R^2 change = .05, p < .01, F change = 10.87, p < .001). The results of the regression partially support H1 and suggest that trust significantly predicted Relational Security (β =.22). Partners who trusted each other were more likely to report Relational Security as a criterion for keeping secrets from their partner.

Trust served as the independent variable, and Intimate Exchange was the dependent variable in the second hierarchical regression. Relational length was statistically controlled by entering it in the first step of the equation. Trust was entered in the second step of the equation. As Table 4 summarizes, trust was significantly associated with Intimate Exchange (F [1, 202] = 4.63, p < .05), but after controlling for relational length it did not account for a significant amount of variance in Intimate Exchange (R^2 change = .01, F change = 2.29 *ns*).

In the third hierarchical regression, trust was the independent variable, and Conversational Appropriateness was the dependent variable. Again, relational length was controlled by entering it in step 1 of the equation. Trust was entered in the second step. As Table 4 illustrates, trust was not significantly associated with Conversational

[3] Frequency of contact was significantly associated with Help and Comfort (r = .17; p < .05).

Appropriateness (F [1, 202] = 2.88, *ns*). After controlling for relational length, Trust did not significantly account for the variance in the model (R^2 change = .002, F change = .50 *ns*).

Trust served as the independent variable, and Family Membership was the dependent variable in the fourth hierarchical regression. Relational length was controlled for by entering it in step 1 of the equation. Trust was entered in the equation in the second step. Table 5 contains the standardized beta weights and the R^2 change for each step of the equation. Results suggest that trust was significantly associated with Family Membership (F [1, 199] = 4.09, $p < .05$) but after controlling for relational length, trust did not account for a significant amount of variance in Family Membership (R^2 change = .01, F change = 2.30, *ns*).

In the fifth hierarchical regression, trust served as the independent variable, and Help and Comfort was the dependent variable. Because of the significant correlation between frequency of contact and the dependent variable, frequency of contact was controlled by entering it in the first step of the regression equation. Trust was entered in during the second step of the equation, and it was not significantly related to Help and Comfort (F [1, 203] = 1.97, *ns*). Results suggest that when trust was added to the model in step 2, it did not account for a significant amount of variance in Help and Comfort (R^2 change = .001, F change = .18, *ns*).

The five remaining associations between variables of interest in the study were tested by linear regressions (see Table 6). In each of the regressions, trust served as the independent variable, and the dependent variable was a factor that characterized the

measure of participants' willingness to keep a secret. Results suggest that trust was not a significant predictor of the factor Exposure (F [1, 205] = .48, *ns*; R^2 change = .002, *ns*), the factor Urgency/Important Reason (F [1, 205] = 1.00, *ns*; R^2 change = .005, *ns*), the factor Acceptance (F [1, 205] = 1.27, *ns*; R^2 change = .006, *ns*), the factor Never (F [1, 205] = .80, *ns*; R^2 change = .004, *ns*), or the factor Permission (F [1, 203] = .46, *ns*; R^2 change = .002, *ns*).

Dyadic Trust and Number of Secrets Kept from a Partner

In order to investigate whether a negative association exists between individuals' levels of dyadic trust in their partner and the number of secrets kept from that partner (H2), a Pearson correlation was conducted. Results suggest that there was a significant negative association between the number of secrets kept from a partner and dyadic trust (r = -.21; p < .01).

Frequency of Discussing Expectations Regarding Secrecy and Trust

To assess the relationship between individuals' trust in their romantic partner and the frequency with which individuals discussed how to manage secrecy with their partner (RQ1) a hierarchical regression was performed. Frequency of contact was controlled for statistically by entering it in step 1 because it was significantly correlated with trust. The independent variable, frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy, was entered in as the second step. The dependent variable was trust. Results suggest that frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy was not significantly associated with trust and that frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy only accounted

for 3% of the variance in trust (F [1, 204] = 2.75, *ns*; R^2 change = .00, F change = .02 *ns*). Table 7 includes the standardized beta weights and the R^2 change for each step of the equation.

Frequency and Willingness to Keep Secrets from a Partner

The relationship between individuals' willingness to keep a secret from their partner and the frequency with which individuals discussed secrecy with that same partner (RQ2) was investigated using a hierarchical regression. Relational length was entered in the regression in step 1 to control for it statistically because it was significantly correlated with willingness to keep secrets from a partner. Frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy was the independent variable and was entered in the equation in step 2. Willingness to keep a secret from a partner was the dependent variable. As summarized in Table 8, results suggest that frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy was not significantly associated with willingness to keep a secret from a partner and that it only accounted for 2% of the variance in the model (F [1, 202] = 4.34, p = < .01; R^2 change = .01, *ns, F* change = 3.52 *ns*).

Ten regressions were conducted in order to further explore RQ2, (see Tables 9-11). In each of the first four hierarchical regressions, relational length was controlled by entering it in the first step of the equation because it was significantly correlated with each of the dependent variables. In the fifth hierarchical regression, frequency of contact was controlled for in the same manner because of its correlation with the dependent

variable. In order to test the remaining associations between variables, simple linear regressions were conducted.

In the first hierarchical regression, frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy served as the independent variable, and Relational Security was the dependent variable. Because it was significantly correlated with Relational Security, relational length was controlled by entering it in the first step in the equation. Frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy was entered in the second step in the equation. As can be seen in Table 9, relational length accounted for 6% of the variance in the model. Frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy was significantly associated with Relational Security (F [1, 202] = 6.44, p < .01) but after controlling relational length, did not account for a significant amount of the variance in Relational Security (R^2 change = .00, F change = .00, *ns*).

In the second hierarchical regression, frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy served as the independent variable, and Intimate Exchange was the dependent variable. Relational length was statistically controlled by entering it in the first step of the equation. Frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy was entered in the second step of the equation. As Table 9 summarizes, frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy was significantly associated with Intimate Exchange (F [1, 202] = 4.15, p < .05), but after controlling relational length, it did not account for a significant amount of variance in intimate exchange (R^2 change = .006, F change = 1.36 *ns*).

In the third hierarchical regression, frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy was the independent variable, and Conversational Appropriateness was the dependent variable. Again, relational length was controlled by entering it in step 1 of the equation. Frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy was entered in the second step. As Table 10 illustrates, frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy was not significantly associated with Conversational Appropriateness (F [1, 202] = 2.63, *ns*). After controlling for relational length, Frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy did not significantly account for the variance in the model, (R^2 change = .00, F change = .004 *ns*).

In the fourth hierarchical regression, frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy served as the independent variable, and Family Membership was the dependent variable. Relational length was controlled for by entering it in step 1 of the equation, due to its significant correlation with Family Membership. Frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy was entered in the equation in the second step. Table 10 includes the standardized beta weights and the R^2 change for each step of the equation. Results suggest that frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy was significantly associated with Family Membership (F [1, 199] = 3.13, $p < .05$) but after controlling for relational length, did not account for a significant amount of variance in Family Membership (R^2 change = .002, F change = .43 *ns*). In the fifth hierarchical regression, frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy served as the independent variable, and Help and Comfort was the dependent variable. Because of the significant correlation between frequency of contact and the dependent variable,

frequency of contact was controlled by entering it in the first step of the regression equation. Frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy was entered in the second step of the equation, and it was significantly related to Help and Comfort (F [1, 203] = 4.09, $p < .05$). Results suggest that when frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy was added to the model in step 2, it accounted for 4% of the variance in Help and Comfort (R^2 change = .02, $p < .05$, F change = 4.34, $p < .05$). Table 10 contains the standardized beta weights and the R^2 change for each step of the hierarchical regression equation.

The five remaining associations between variables of interest in the study were tested by linear regressions (see Table 11). In each of the regressions, frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy served as the independent variable, and the dependent variable was a factor that characterized the measure of participants' willingness to keep a secret. Results suggest that frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy was not a significant predictor of the factor Exposure (F [1, 205] = .28, *ns*; R^2 change = .001, *ns*), the factor Urgency/Important Reason (F [1, 205] = 2.38, *ns*; R^2 change = .01 *ns*), the factor Acceptance (F [1, 205] = 3.37, *ns*; R^2 change = .02, *ns*), the factor Never (F [1, 205] = .06, *ns*; R^2 change = .001, *ns*), or the factor Permission (F [1, 203] = .24, *ns*; R^2 change = .001, *ns*).

Frequency and Number of Secrets Kept from a Partner

A Pearson correlation was conducted in which the frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy was related to the number of secrets, in order to

investigate the association between the frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy and the number of secrets that individuals keep from their partner (RQ3). This correlation was not significant (r = .07; *ns*).

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Participants' open-ended responses were coded in order to explore individuals' reasons for and against discussing expectations regarding secrecy, and to identify the communicative strategies that individuals and partners might use during these discussions.

Coding of Reasons for and Against Discussing Expectations

Analytic induction (Bulmer, 1979) was used to code the two open-ended items assessing respondents' reasons for discussing (RQ4) and not discussing (RQ5) expectations with their partner. The data (the respondents' answers to the open-ended items) were used to inductively derive the categorization systems used in the current study.

First, the researcher read all of the open-ended data. Lazarsfeld (1972) suggests that researchers should first decide how broad or narrow the categories will be, based on what is appropriate for the given question. In this case, the categories needed to reflect the reasons that respondents had for discussing or not discussing expectations with their partner. These initial categories were "provisional, permitting the flexible use of subsequent interpretation" (Spiggle, 1994, p. 493).

The number of reasons that participants reported was then examined. The vast majority of participants (99%) cited one reason for each of the open-ended questions. Thus, the data for each participant were coded for one overarching reason.

Next, the researcher read participants' open-ended responses, marked portions of text that suggested a reason for discussing/not discussing, and developed a new category for each reason that emerged. The procedure was replicated for each of the two open-ended items on the survey. After the initial category schemes were developed, the researcher met with a colleague to discuss definitions for each category. Categories were further refined, and the researcher recoded all the data. The process of assigning, combining, and eliminating categories as needed continued until all of the data were coded.

The researcher then met with an independent coder who was blind to the research questions and hypotheses of the current study. A randomly selected sample of 25% of the data was coded to assess reliability. Cohen's Kappa was calculated because it is appropriate in instances when data are categorical or nominal, and it takes into account the amount of agreement that could occur due to chance alone (Banerjee, Capozzoli, McSweeney, & Sinha, 1999). A value greater than 0.75 represents excellent agreement beyond chance, while values below 0.40 represent relatively poor agreement, and values between 0.40 and 0.75 are taken to represent fair to good agreement (Benerjee et al., 1999). There was good agreement between coders for participants' reasons for discussing secrecy with a partner (Kappa = .71), and excellent agreement for participants' reasons for not discussing secrecy (Kappa = .88). The researcher then met with the independent

coder to discuss disagreements in coding and the wording of the categories was clarified and disagreements were resolved.

The final categories for reasons for discussing secrecy with a romantic partner were: to clarify expectations; to be on the same page; to prevent disclosure to a target; to define the relational consequences of disclosure; to verify trust; to establish boundaries associated with a shared network; to exercise complete openness; to seek knowledge about the partner's secrecy; and never the case (see Table 12). The category that was most frequently reported by participants as a reason for discussing secrecy with a romantic partner was to prevent disclosure (e.g., "If we don't discuss it, one of us may disclose to others information that needed to be kept a secret.") To clarify expectations was the next most common category, followed by to exercise complete openness, to be on the same page, and to verify trust.

The final categories for reasons against discussing secrecy with a romantic partner were: discussion is not necessary the partners have not had the chance; the discussion would be awkward; fear of what might happen or be revealed; to allow autonomy in the relationship; still keeping secret from partner; avoid hurting others; secret is low risk/partners not concerned; tried to discuss but it backfired; to avoid conflict; and never the case (see Table 13). As Table 13 illustrates, not necessary was the category most frequently reported by participants as a reason against discussing secrecy with a romantic partner (e.g., "I trust him fully and by now, more times than not, we have an understanding and know when to keep quiet.") It is interesting to note that the next most reported category was never the case. People who reported this reason noted that they

always discussed secrecy with their partner. The next most frequently cited reasons against discussing secrecy with a partner were low risk secret/partners not concerned, and still keeping secret from partner.

Coding of Communicative Strategies Attempted While Discussing Secrets

The present study investigated how individuals communicate with a partner regarding expectations of managing secrecy. Specifically, RQ6 aimed to identify communicative strategies that individuals employ when discussing secrecy expectations with their partner. Participants were asked to recreate conversations in which they and their partner discussed their expectations about secrecy.

To analyze the data, the researcher first read all of the participants' recreated conversations and identified and marked portions of text that suggested a strategy. These marked segments of text were compared to strategies for managing information suggested from prior literature. Petronio (2002) has argued that individuals explicitly manage their private information by using strategies that include boundary linkages, boundary ownership, prior restraint phrases, and boundary sanctions. In the initial analysis of the data, it became apparent that participants' attempts to coordinate secrecy were similar to the categories of strategies described by Petronio.

The researcher then met with a colleague to discuss the definitions for each category. Because the strategies described by Petronio (2002) fit the data well, it was agreed that the researcher would use those communicative strategies as a framework to code the data. Next, the researcher read all of the data again and coded each strategy as

one of the four different types of attempts to coordinate privacy with a romantic partner that Petronio identified: *boundary linkages; boundary ownership* (*clarifying boundary ownership, defining the boundary ownership as not static, or establishing congruity in the boundary ownership*); *prior restraint phrases*; and *boundary sanctions (sanctions of past disclosures or establishing sanctions)*.

The number of strategies used in the conversations was also recorded. The vast majority (97%) of participants recreated a conversation in which one strategy was employed. Thus, each participant's data were coded for one overarching strategy. Next, an independent coder, who was blind to the research questions and hypotheses of the current study, coded a randomly selected sample of 25% of the data to assess reliability. There was excellent agreement for communicative strategies attempted when discussing secrecy expectations with a partner (Kappa = .80). The researcher and independent coder met to discuss and resolve disagreements in coding.

The data were then coded for who employed the strategy during the conversation (e.g., self, partner, or both). An independent coder coded a randomly selected sample of 25% of the data to assess reliability. There was excellent agreement for whether self, partner, or both employed the strategy (Kappa = .85).

Thirteen of the respondents recreated conversations that were uncodable. Some of these participants described conversations that were not about secrecy management (n = 5). Other participants did not recreate a conversation and rather stated that they stated they don't manage secrecy with a partner (n = 5). The last circumstance that resulted in an uncodable recreated conversation occurred when participants recreated the

conversation in such a way that the strategy was implied and was never actually verbalized (n = 3).

An analysis of the data in the current study suggests that two types of Petronio's sanctions may exist. These were *sanctions of past disclosures* (e.g., one or both partners attempts to humiliate or point out faults, or the other partner's mistakes regarding past disclosures) and *establishing sanctions* (e.g., attempts to establish or make explicit the consequences for violations of boundaries) (See Table 14).

Overall, the most frequently reported communicative strategy was *clarifying boundary ownership,* which was where participants stated specifically who should or should not hear the secret (e.g., "Whatever you do, don't tell John about what we did last night.") The second most frequently employed strategy was *prior restraint phrases,* which referred to general attempts to define the degree to which others had access to the secret, or how open or closed the boundaries were to a secret (e.g., "don't tell anyone that I told you this"). *Establishing congruity in the boundary ownership* (e.g., attempts to get on the same page or get the story straight or plan what the partners will do with the secret), was the third most frequently employed strategy, and *sanctions of past disclosures* was fourth.

Table 14 shows the definitions, examples, and frequencies of each strategy reported by participants, separated by who used the strategy. There were 102 self-employed strategies, 78 partner-employed strategies, and 9 strategies that were employed by both partners. In 19 cases, it could not be established whether the partner, the participant, or both employed the strategy.

Clarifying boundary ownership was the most often reported strategy that was used by participants (i.e., self), followed by *prior restraint phrases*, and *sanctions of past disclosures.* Likewise, *clarifying boundary ownership* was the most often reported strategy that was used by a partner, followed by *prior restraint phrases*. The two strategies next most often reported were *boundary linkages* and *defining the boundary ownership as not static.*

When both partners used a communicative strategy, they most often employed *establishing congruity in the boundary ownership,* wherein they came up with a plan and coordinated how to manage the secret.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The current study investigated the willingness of individuals to keep secrets from their partner, the number of secrets that people keep from their partner, individuals' reports of reasons for discussing expectations regarding secrets, and the association between each of these characteristics and partners' trust.

Dyadic Trust and Willingness to Keep a Secret from a Partner

The current study found that dyadic trust and willingness to keep a secret from a partner were not significantly associated with each other (H1). Only one subscale of the measure of willingness to keep a secret, Relational Security, was significantly linked to trust. A higher total score on the willingness to keep secrets scale indicated a higher willingness to keep secrets from their partner. Individuals who trusted their partner were more likely to report that increases in Relational Security would not affect their decision to keep the secret from their partner. Previous studies have found that secret holders are more likely to disclose to a confidant when they perceive that confidant as trustworthy (Kelly & McKillop, 1996), and conversely, may not disclose to a confidant who lacks trustworthiness (Wheeless & Grotz, 1977). Trust did not have a significant impact on whether individuals reported other factors of the measure willingness to keep a secret.

When responding to the items that assessed willingness to keep secrets, participants were asked to think of one secret that they were keeping, and to note why they were keeping the secret. One explanation for the non-significant association between

trust and willingness is that the reasons participants kept the secret from their partner impacted participants' willingness scores. Specifically, reasons for keeping a secret may act as a moderating variable and affect the direction and/or strength of the association between trust and willingness to keep a secret from a partner (Baron & Kenny, 1986). For example, there may be a stronger association between trust and willingness to keep a secret for people who keep secrets because secret holders are worried about negative evaluation (Vrig et al., 2001). People who are worried about negative evaluation from partners may require more trust in a partner in order to reveal a secret. The need to avoid negative evaluation may override the desire to reveal the secret to the partner because the focus is on preventing the partner from evaluating the secret holder negatively. An interesting avenue for researchers to explore is whether the associations between trust and the different factors of the measure willingness to keep a secret are influenced by individuals' reason for keeping a secret from their partner.

Perhaps the type of secret that participants reported influenced the association between trust and willingness to keep a secret from a partner. Individuals are usually more concerned about keeping some topics concealed than other topics (Vangelisti, 1994). For example, people who keep taboo secrets (those emphasizing activities or events that are stigmatized or condemned by society), may be more willing to keep those secrets from their partner than other types of secrets, in order to avoid negative evaluation. Future studies could investigate whether trust and willingness to keep a secret from a partner are significantly correlated when those secrets are about taboo topics.

Risk may be linked to trust and the willingness to keep secrets from a partner. For instance, secrets that a secret holder views as relatively risky may be more likely than those viewed by the secret holder as relatively low risk, to increase the salience of trust for participants.

In the case of relatively low-risk secrets, individuals may perceive that revealing the secret would carry low risk, and so trust would not be as salient to these individuals. For example, an individual who keeps a secret about a partner's surprise party, a low-risk secret, might have high willingness to share the secret with others, because he/she may perceive low risk in disclosing the secret to others. A secret holder's willingness to keep this type of low-risk secret from others probably has little to do with trust, and disclosure of the secret may not incur much risk for the secret holder. Because it is a surprise party, the secret holder feels it necessary to keep the secret from the partner, regardless of trust.

When individuals keep a relatively high-risk secret, such as a family secret about their father spending time in prison, their willingness to keep the secret from a partner might be impacted by the risk involved in disclosing the secret to the partner. The secret holders may be concerned that the partner will think negatively of them if the partner were to know the secret. In this case, the relatively high-risk secret may increase the salience of trust for the secret holder. Previous research suggests that individuals with secrets that are taboo and relatively high-risk, may feel that they have to become closer with others and trust them more in order to tell them the secret (Vangelisti et al., 2001). In short, perception of risk may influence the relationship between trust and willingness to keep a secret from a partner.

It may be that in the current study, assessing relatively risky secrets would have made trust more salient for participants. Individuals perceive less risk in romantic relationships when they trust in their partner (Holmes, 1991). Indeed, the need for trust in a partner is made salient for a secret holder when the secret holder perceives disclosure as risky. In this way, risk may factor heavily into the disclosure decision (Afifi & Stueber, 2009). To more effectively assess the association between trust and willingness to keep a secret from a partner, future studies could measure the degree to which participants perceive that the secret is risky. Participants who perceive they have relatively risky secrets could be compared with those participants who report secrets that are relatively safe to see if risk influences the association between trust and willingness. It is unclear whether risk will increase or decrease the salience of trust for participants. Further study of the association between willingness to keep a secret from a partner, trust, and risk, is merited. In sum, the present findings reveal that dyadic trust of a partner can have little to do with whether an individual is willing to keep a certain secret from that partner.

DYADIC TRUST AND NUMBER OF SECRETS KEPT FROM A PARTNER

The current study extends knowledge regarding the number of secrets kept from a partner, relational characteristics such as frequency of discussing secrecy expectations with partners, and trust of partners. The findings associated with RQ3, regarding the number of secrets kept and frequency of discussing secrecy expectations with a partner, were not significant. It was also hypothesized that dyadic trust and the number of secrets that individuals keep from their partner would be significantly and negatively correlated.

This hypothesis (H2) was supported. Previous studies have examined the number of secrets that people think their partner is keeping (Finkenauer & Hazam, 2000), and individuals' perception of the number of secrets that their family keeps compared to other families (Vangelisti, 1994). While prior research has found a low but significant correlation between self-disclosure and trust (Wheeless & Grotz, 1977), the current study provides support for the argument that trust and the disclosure of secrets are associated. Individuals with high trust in a partner tend to keep fewer secrets from that same partner. Because there are some types of secrets that are likely to be kept from a partner regardless of trust (Major & Gramzow, 1999), trust in a partner merits further investigation as a variable in the study of secrecy.

DYADIC TRUST AND FREQUENCY OF DISCUSSING EXPECTATIONS

Trust and frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy were not significantly associated with each other (RQ1). This finding runs contrary to previous studies of close relationships which suggest that trust can be associated with an increase in the amount of disclosure (Wheeless & Grotz, 1977), the intimacy of disclosure (Larzelere & Huston, 1980), and the likelihood of revealing family secrets (Vangelisti et al., 2001). Previous literature suggested two possibilities for the association between trust and the frequency of discussing expectations. The first was that individuals who trust their partners enough to initiate conversations with partners about disclosure practices might be more likely to discuss how secrets should be managed. This may be the case because dyadic trust is associated with increased intimacy of disclosure (Larzelere &

Huston, 1980) and conversations regarding secrecy expectations may include intimate disclosures. The second possibility was that people might choose to discuss their expectations of how they should manage secrets, not because of trust, but because of a lack of trust. Individuals are likely to have low trust in a partner who has exhibited behaviors that warrant low levels of trust, and a history of erratic or unpredictable behavior may erode established trust (Holmes, 1991). The uncooperative nature of an untrustworthy partner (Gambetta, 1988) may lead individuals to attempt to establish rules regarding the disclosure of secrets (Petronio, 2002) in order to avoid possible betrayal by the partner (Ullmann-Margalit, 2004).

In the current study, 91% of partners in romantic relationships reported that they discussed how to manage secrecy with their partner. This suggests that managing secrecy with a romantic partner is a fairly common and memorable practice. The current study's findings mirror the findings of Petronio and Bantz (1991), which suggest that individuals use prior restraint phrases in order to exercise control over the disclosure of secrets by partners. Participants reported that they engage in discussions in order to make their wishes and expectations clear to their partner regarding secrecy.

While discussing how to manage secrecy was common among participants, having these discussions was sometimes awkward, troubling, and uncomfortable for the participant, and other times, was completely avoided. Further, trust in a partner did not guarantee that individuals would choose to discuss how to manage secrecy with their partner. One reason for this may be that the frequency with which partners discuss relationship issues varies with individuals' perception of their own communication

efficacy. People tend to avoid conversations that they feel will not go well and instead engage others in conversations that they believe will have positive outcomes. Outcome expectancy (i.e., the assessment of rewards and costs that will likely result from an action) has been shown to be mediated by individuals' assessment of their efficacy (i.e., whether someone can engage in that action) (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). Perhaps the frequency with which individuals discuss secrecy expectations with their partner is associated with their communication efficacy. It is possible that when individuals feel that they are able and skilled enough to engage in these conversations with a partner, they have these conversations more often. Communication efficacy may influence the association between trust and frequency of discussing secrecy expectations. Prior research suggests that when people do not feel skilled, they tend to avoid certain conversations with family members (Afifi et al., 2006).

The frequency with which partners discuss relationship issues may also vary with the point of time in the relationship when the study is conducted. Future studies could examine whether the point of time in the romantic relationship, and the events that are taking place at that point, impact the association between trust and how often partners discuss secrecy expectations. It may be that participants engage in discussion of how to manage secrecy more often at one point of time in their relationship than at another point of time. At different points of time in the relationship, partners may have different needs for discussing certain topics. The frequency with which partners discuss how to manage secrecy could be associated with certain events that would create a need for discussing secrecy. For example, novel life events, such as one partner taking a new job, can create

the need for discussing how to manage secrecy (Petronio, 2002). It would be interesting to see if certain time points, such as the occurrence of novel events in romantic relationships, are associated with the frequency with which partners discuss how to manage secrecy.

Additionally, some individuals are considered openers: that is, other people are quite comfortable discussing topics with them or intimately self-disclosing to them (Miller, Berg, & Archer, 1983). Others exhibit behaviors that make them appear less approachable or less supportive. In the case of the current study, the frequency with which partners discuss how to manage secrecy might be associated with how open one partner believes the other partner to be. Perceived openness may influence the association between trust and frequency of discussions with partners of how to manage secrets.

Frequency of Discussing Expectations and Willingness to Keep a Secret from a Partner

RQ2 examined the relationship between the frequency with which individuals discuss secrecy expectations with their partner and individuals' willingness to keep a secret from their partner. The findings of the hierarchical regressions conducted in the current study should be interpreted with caution because the number of multiple hierarchical regressions performed may have increased the Type I error rate (Mundfrom, Perrett, Schaffer, Piccone, & Roozeboom, 2007). Overall, there was no significant

association between participants' willingness to keep a secret from their partner and frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy.

Notably, there was no significant association between the factor Acceptance and frequency of discussing expectations regarding secrecy. This suggests that secret holders' predictions about their partner's response to their disclosure did not play a role in how often they discussed their secrecy expectations with their partner. This finding runs contrary to prior research, which suggests that unresponsive partners tend to foster environments that secret holders may deem unsafe or inappropriate for disclosure (Jones & Wirtz, 2006). Individuals in the current study who perceived that their partners were not likely to attack them or judge them after hearing a secret were no more likely to discuss their expectations regarding secrecy with a partner than were those participants who perceived that their partner would judge them after hearing the secret.

By contrast, the frequency of discussing secrecy expectations significantly and negatively predicted the factor in the willingness measure labeled Help and Comfort. A higher total score on this scale indicated a higher willingness to keep secrets from their partner. Participants who tended to discuss secrecy expectations were more likely to report that if revealing their secret would help or comfort their partner, they would be less willing to keep the secret from their partner. This finding suggests that participants who perceived that telling their secret would help or comfort their partner in some way were more likely to discuss their expectations regarding secrecy with their partner. It may be that these participants help their partners navigate how to treat secrets within the relationship (Petronio, 2002). Individuals may also discuss how to manage secrets to

make their partner privy to new information or new perspectives regarding the secret (Kelly & McKillop, 1996). Having these conversations might offer comfort for their partners. For instance, upon hearing a partner's expectations regarding a secret that was problematic, the other partner might disclose and discuss expectations regarding an equally troubling secret. This reciprocal disclosure may occur partly because the topic was brought up by one partner (Gouldner, 1960) and the other partner feels that sharing their expectations will help or comfort their partner.

Future studies could further investigate how one partner's comforting messages might influence the other partner to discuss his/her expectations regarding secrecy management. It would also be interesting to explore further how individuals employ communicative strategies in order to offer comfort to secret holders. For instance, in cases when both partners are keeping a negative secret, one partner might disclose the secret to the other partner to help the partner feel that he/she was not alone in keeping a worrisome secret. Additionally, it would be illuminating to investigate whether secret holders who receive reassuring messages from partners are more or less likely to report that they were later betrayed when their partner revealed the secret to others.

REASONS FOR DISCUSSING SECRECY EXPECTATIONS

RQ4 explored the reasons participants might discuss secrecy expectations with their partner. Previous literature suggests that individuals may have a variety of reasons for making their expectations explicit to partners. One reason is that because secret holders expect discretion from partners (Kelly & McKillop, 1996; Petronio & Bantz,

1991), they might want to clarify to the partner that the secret should not be shared with others. Indeed, *to clarify expectations* was cited as a reason for discussing expectations by 16% of the participants in the current study.

Another reason, *to be on the same page*, reflects the notion that some partners discuss their expectations about secrecy because they want to coordinate efforts with the partner. Perhaps one way to get a partner to cooperate with secrecy expectations is to first air those expectations to the partner. It is in the best interest of the secret holder to have a cooperative partner (Gambetta, 1988), especially when discussing expectations. Cooperative partners may be more likely to honor the wishes of the secret holder and less likely to reveal the secret without first securing permission from the secret holder.

In the current study, *to prevent disclosure to a target* was the most often cited reason for discussing expectations. This reason suggests that participants felt that they could effectively curb disclosure of secrets by a partner by discussing expectations for their partner to keep the secret from others. Previous literature suggests that regardless of whether prior restraint phrases were used, partners often betray individuals' wishes about what should be done with a secret (Petronio & Bantz, 1991). The participants in this study reported that they attempted these prior restraint phrases with partners anyway. When individuals have high-outcome expectations, or perceive that they can effectively influence a partner's behaviors (Bandura, 1977), perhaps they are more likely to use prior restraint phrases.

It is unclear from the data whether secret holders who share their secrets with partners do so in order to coordinate the management of the secret. The current study

collected participants' reasons for discussing expectations regarding secrecy. However, those reasons are not necessarily the reasons that motivated participants to discuss their expectations about a specific secret. Participants were not asked to report why they discussed secrecy expectations in the conversation that they recreated.

Regardless of secret holders' motivations, once secrets are shared with partners, secret holders are left at the mercy of partners. Partners can cooperate with secret holders to coordinate the management of secrets (Petronio, 2002) or they can use the secret against the secret holder (Ullmann-Margalit, 2004). Individuals who are told secrets may have an irresistible urge to tell others (Kelly & McKillop, 1996). A deeper look at the findings from the current study points to an intriguing problem for secret holders: Secret holders have a need to control their own information (Petronio, 2002), and after disclosing a secret to a partner, they are left in a vulnerable position. In order to exercise control over what the partner does with the secret, they may find it necessary to explicitly share their wishes with the partner. However, explicitly sharing their wishes with their partner can increase the likelihood of that partner revealing the secret to others (Petronio & Bantz, 1991).

Reasons Against Discussing Secrecy Expectations

RQ5 explored participants' reasons against discussing secrecy expectations with their partner. In the current study, 46% of individuals reported that they did not discuss secrecy expectations with their partner because it was not necessary. These participants often reported that they had established a relational environment in which discussing how

to manage secrecy was not necessary. They trusted their partner to not tell their secrets to others, or they felt that not sharing the secret was a matter of common sense. The mean trust score of participants who cited this reason against discussing expectations was 5.73 out of 7.00; this suggests relatively high dyadic trust in partners. It should also be noted that the overall mean of dyadic trust in the current study was quite high ($M = 5.47$). Future examination of participants who have lower levels of dyadic trust in their partners would be helpful. Researchers could explore whether the finding that almost half of the current participants reported that it was not necessary to discuss secrecy expectations, would replicate.

Another reason participants noted they did not discuss their expectations was that they were still keeping the secret from their partner (7%). It is not necessary that an individual's secret be revealed to a partner in order for a discussion regarding secrecy expectations to take place. However, these participants noted that because discussing secrecy expectations with a partner would result in disclosure of the secret, and they wanted to continue to withhold the secret from their partner, that they avoided discussing expectations.

Reasons against discussing secrecy expectations with a romantic partner also reflected previous literature in that 5% of participants indicated that they did not discuss secrecy expectations because they were uncomfortable discussing topics that involve relationship norms or rules, and that they avoid discussing these topics (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004). It is possible that discussing how to manage secrecy would

bring attention to the other partner's lack of trustworthiness, or would bring the status of the relationship into focus (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985).

Similarly, 4% of participants noted that they were afraid to find out information during these discussions, that they were fearful of the partner thinking negatively of them because of the discussion, or that they did not want to know how secretive their partner might be toward them. These findings suggest that individuals feared the possible negative impact on their relationship of discussing norms and expectations about secrecy with their partner (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985), and so they opted against initiating these conversations with their partners.

Approximately 9% of participants reported that they did not discuss secrecy expectations concerning certain secrets because the secret was considered low risk. They reasoned that these low-risk secrets were not a concern to their partner or did not impact the relationship with their partner, and so they did not discuss their expectations, but rather usually disclosed the secret to their partner without voicing their expectations. This finding may add to our understanding of individuals' perception of what constitutes a secret. Previous literature has suggested that private information falls into three perceived risk levels (Petronio, 2002), however, the reason against discussing expectations, labeled *low risk/partners not concerned,* which emerged in the current study, runs contrary to Petronio's conceptualization of secrecy as private information that is inherently high risk. In other words, these participants perceived that they held certain secrets that were low risk, even though some researchers have suggested that only information that is considered high risk is conceptualized as a secret (Petronio, 2002). One of the reasons

that participants gave for why the secret was of low risk was that the secret was not about them. Previous research has suggested that individuals keep in mind the target of the secret (Fisher, 1986) when making disclosure decisions.

COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES USED IN MANAGING SECRECY

Because the literature on secrecy management discussions between romantic partners is limited, RQ6 sought to add to our understanding by identifying what communicative strategies might be present during these discussions. Specifically, this study was interested in finding out what communicative strategies partners use in order to manage secrecy.

The current study employed a categorization scheme based on the extant literature regarding privacy management (Petronio, 2002). Overall, the results suggest that individuals manage secrecy with their partners in a fashion similar to how they manage private information. Indeed, the privacy management strategies developed in previous literature were a good fit for the data in the current study. Each of the categories from previous literature on privacy management strategies (Petronio, 2002) was present in the data. When attempting to manage secrecy with a partner, individuals in the current study employed the strategies describe by Petronio (2002) (e.g., boundary linkages, boundary ownership, prior restraint phrases, and boundary sanctions). The content of the secrets reported by participants ranged from health diagnoses to intimate family secrets to law infringement.

Discussions that partners have regarding secrecy management can provide an intriguing context for studying secrecy because they provide information about secret holders' and confidants' experiences before, during, and after the disclosure of a secret. Exploring these conversations also provides a window into the interaction that occurs prior to disclosure. It is interesting to note that some of the participants reported that they did not have these conversations because they were still keeping a secret from their partner. While previous literature suggests that secret holders use conversations with partners to gauge whether to disclose their secrets (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985), it is unknown whether any of the participants in the current study employed these conversations in order to aid in their disclosure decision.

When there was a disclosure during the conversation, the partners' reactions provided data about how the secret was received. Partner reactions to the secret varied in the current study, and sometimes the partners argued with each other about secrecy expectations that one partner had violated. Sometimes one partner brought up concerns regarding secrecy or complained that the other partner failed to meet his or her secrecy expectations.

The current study asked participants to recreate a conversation in which they and their romantic partner discussed secrecy expectations. Out of the 208 participants, 7 (3%) wrote that they never discuss secrecy expectations with their partner. The remaining 201 recreated conversations that included a communicative strategy.

Individuals sometimes disclose secrets to bond with close others (Vangelisti, 1994). An analysis of the recreated conversations suggests that partners employ

communicative strategies in order to reinforce closeness in their relationship. In the current study, 7% of the secret holders first told their partner why they were sharing the secret. This communicative strategy described to the partner how certain attributes of the partner led the individual to share the secret with the partner. Following Petronio's classification of privacy management strategies, this first strategy was entitled *boundary linkages.* This reason for disclosure most often appeared at the beginning of the conversation to preface why the secret holder wanted to discuss expectations with the partner; it also signaled to the partner that lack of trust was not an issue in the relationship. Sometimes these conversations would begin with phrases such as, "I'm telling you this because we are dating, and I trust you." It is possible that secret holders used this strategy in order to set the tone of the conversation or to provide a conversational opening for the upcoming disclosure. When reasons for disclosure were given, the partner with the secret did not use a prior restraint phrase later in the conversation. It might be that this first strategy made it unnecessary to remind the partner to not tell others. Perhaps the secret holder perceived that using this strategy was an effective way to impart the gravity of the conversation that would follow.

The second strategy that emerged from the data also supported previous research on privacy boundaries (Petronio, 2002) and involved partners explicitly discussing who was allowed to hear the secret. This finding supports previous literature that has suggested that boundaries surround secrets and that individuals are drawn toward managing and controlling these boundaries by specifying who can and cannot hear the secret (Petronio, 2002). In the current study, three subtypes of Petronio's (2002)

boundary ownership strategy emerged. Following Petronio's categorization scheme, the first subtype was labeled *clarifying boundary ownership*. Approximately 31% of participants recreated conversations that included attempts to clarify boundary ownership regarding secrecy by specifying to their partners who should or should not hear the secret.

The second subtype of the boundary ownership strategy also matched Petronio's (2002) classification of privacy management strategies and was called *defining the boundary ownership as not static*. This strategy often emerged in the middle of the conversation. After disclosing the secret to their partner, individuals would attempt to convince the partner that he/she should wait until a certain date, or until a certain event, before disclosing the secret to others. One reason that secret holders might find it necessary to discuss timing with their partner is that they want to disclose the secret to the partner but also want to maintain control over the information. These individuals might think that they can influence their partner's disclosure plans by conveying to the partner that they want to be the one to decide when and on what terms the secret is disclosed to others. Sometimes secret holders explicitly stated that they did not want the partner to interfere, and that they would disclose the secret when the time was right.

The final subtype of these boundary strategies was entitled, *establishing congruity in the boundary ownership.* Following Petronio's (2002) classification scheme, these discussions were those in which one partner guided the other with regard to what should be done with the secret. Both partners came up with a plan, and both were privy to the secret. In the current study, 9% of participants recalled discussions that were a

coordinated effort between romantic partners. Sometimes the partners disagreed on procedures, such as whom should be told, when others should be told, or in what environment the disclosure should occur. However, by the end of the conversation, one of the partners always convinced the other as to what the plan should be. The other person either gave in begrudgingly or trusted that his/her partner knew best. Sometimes the partner reassured the secret holder that the partner would follow the secret holder's lead and would not act without the secret holder's permission. Partners often reassured secret holders that the secret holder was in charge of the secret. None of the conversations concluded with one partner openly defying the other's plans, although the data suggest that sometimes, after the conversation, one partner outed the secret with little respect for the other's disclosure plan.

The third strategy that emerged was one in which the secret holder explicitly told the partner to not tell anyone else the secret. This strategy, called *prior restraint phrases*, (Petronio & Bantz, 1991) usually occurred prior to disclosing the secret. Individuals in the current study sometimes defined and outlined to their partner the degree to which others had access to the secret (Petronio, 2002). The secret holders in the current study sometimes reported that they told their partner, "You cannot tell anyone this!" In the current study, 23% of secret holders reported that they explicitly told their partner that they expected the partner to honor their wishes. In addition to individuals explicitly telling their partner that they did not want anyone else to know the secret, some individuals listed who already knew the secret. Another common prior restraint phrase was, "only my family and close friends know about the secret." This phrase typically was

aimed at delineating who already knew about the secret and the degree of closeness with the secret holder that was required in order to hear the secret.

Previous literature suggests that individuals bring up complaints or criticism concerning a partner with a goal to influence or change the partner's behavior (Dillard, 1989). The fourth strategy involved attempts to change a partner's behavior regarding disclosure of secrets. Two of the types of sanctions described by Petronio (2002) illustrate these conversations. The first subtype was labeled *sanctions for past disclosures*. This strategy involves one partner attempting to sanction the other, and humiliate the other by pointing out the other's mistakes regarding past disclosures. Sanctions associated with the disclosure were communicated explicitly to the partner, thereby establishing rules in order to manage the secret. In the current study, 9% of partners reported that they threatened sanctions in order to restore control over information when a confidant told others the secret. These conversations were angry and confrontational in tone and usually involved one partner ambushing the other and demanding why he/she had told the secret to someone outside the relationship. In some cases, anger was directed at a partner for withholding a secret. In these conversations, one partner would reprimand the other for a disclosure decision and say, "you should have confided in me, not Justin!" or "I hate it when you tell your sister about our sex life! It is none of her business what we do!" It is unclear whether individuals were more likely to confront their partner when they thought they could effectively influence the partner's behaviors or whether, instead, they confronted their partner simply as a way to express their anger or frustration.

Other conversations (3%) involving sanctions included the individual explicitly establishing the rules for disclosure of secrets. This second subtype of sanctions was titled *establishing sanctions*. These conversations included threats such as, "if you tell Sarah, I swear I will never tell you a secret ever again!" The emergence of this subcategory supports previous literature that suggests that individuals manage privacy with others by conveying sanctions that might be imposed if their wishes are violated regarding keeping certain information secret (Petronio, 2002). It should be noted that this category of sanctions served as a warning before the partner had an opportunity to tell the secret to anyone else, and occurred prior to a violation. It is possible that secret holders employed these sanctions in hopes that they might prevent their partners from violating their wishes. It is unclear whether the participants who employed this strategy did so because the partners had betrayed their confidence in the past.

General Conclusions and Implications

The findings of the current study make two fundamental contributions to the secrecy literature. First, the data provide several reasons for why individuals in romantic relationships discuss their expectations regarding secrecy. The reasons that participants reported for not engaging in these discussions also offer information about what may keep partners from discussing secrecy. Analyses of the recreated conversations provide data regarding the decision-making process as it applies to disclosure. Similar to the process by which individuals assess the risks involved when deciding whether to disclose a secret (Afifi & Steuber, 2009), the results of the current study suggest that individuals

sometimes actively decide to bring up these concerns, expectations, or plans about how to coordinate secrecy with a partner. An analysis of the recreated conversations also offers information from the perspective of one partner regarding how the other partner interacted and whether any expectations were explicitly stated.

The extant literature has explored the process of managing boundaries for privacy (Petronio, 1991, 2002) and investigated prior restraint phrases (Petronio & Bantz, 1991), which are one type of strategy used in these types of discussions, but until the current study, it had not yet identified reasons for discussing secrecy expectations with a partner. A list of criteria that individuals use when deciding whether they will discuss secrecy expectations with a partner could now be developed. These criteria could shed light on what relational and situational factors may impact people's tendency to discuss their expectations with a romantic partner. For example, individuals who refer to the relational reasons (boundary linkages) for discussing expectations with their partner perhaps implement criteria regarding closeness with their partner. If the partner is close enough, the individual might choose to discuss expectations. Additionally, individuals who refer to sanctions during these conversations might implement criteria regarding their partner's prior betrayals. If the individual has reason to suspect that the partner will not honor their expectations, they may choose to discuss expectations in order to give ultimatums to their partner.

Secondly, the results of the current study support the framework of communication privacy management theory (Petronio, 1991, 2002) and provide valuable insight into how individuals in romantic relationships attempt to make their wishes

regarding secrecy explicit to partners via discussion. Participants in the current study cited a number of reasons for discussing secrecy with a partner and identified just as many for not discussing secrecy. According to communication privacy management theory, individuals believe that secrets, once disclosed to a partner, are co-owned (Petronio, 2002), and that disclosures are sometimes managed explicitly. While the current study found plenty of prior restraint phrases, the results of this study suggest that participants use a variety of communicative strategies in order to navigate these conversations.

A major argument of CPM theory rests on the assumption that partners choose to actively express disclosure rules via discussion. While a majority of participants employed prior restraint phrases (Petronio & Bantz, 1991) in order to actively express their wishes, few of the recreated conversations included partners discussing disclosure rules. When asked to recreate a conversation with a partner, a few participants noted on the questionnaire that they did not need to have these discussions with partners because they have established expectations or rules in the course of the relationship. It is possible that these participants established expectations via discussions with their partners in the past. Perhaps specifically asking participants to recreate the first interaction in which the partners established the rules, would further shed light on how these secrecy management processes unfold over time.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While the current study makes contributions to the literature on secrecy, several limitations of this research are worth noting. First, the study employed self-reports. The tendency of participants to cite certain reasons for discussing secrecy, and to endorse certain secrecy characteristics, may not be the same as the ones they actually use in interactions with romantic partners. However, there is evidence that the decision to disclose or keep a secret requires cognitive effort (Lane & Wegner, 1995), and that disclosure decisions are salient and memorable for individuals (Morris, 1981), allowing for relatively accurate accounts of their disclosure decisions (Fisher, 1986) and events surrounding the secret.

Second, the accounts of discussions with partners were retrospective and were limited to the perception of one partner. Future research could compare both partners' accounts of one conversation in which they managed secrecy. Researchers could assess the level of agreement between romantic partners regarding trust, strategies that were used during the secrecy discussion, and other secrecy characteristics. The account from one partner could be compared to that of the other to further shed light on both partners' perspectives regarding how secrets were managed.

Third, the study did not take into consideration the content of the secret and how it might be related to frequency of discussing the secret with a partner. For example, the person who was the focus of the secret was sometimes not specified by the participant. The target of the secret may influence the association between willingness and frequency. Given this limitation, researchers could next look at whether willingness to keep a secret

is dependent on whether the secret is about the secret holder, a friend, a family member, etc.

Fourth, the current study did not examine whether trust was associated with each communication strategy. It may not be the frequency of discussing secrecy expectations that is associated with trust, but instead the strategy that is employed with a partner during discussions about how to manage secrecy. Looking at which strategies are used, based in part on trust level, might elucidate the associations among these variables. For instance, individuals who have high trust in a partner may be more likely to employ a strategy that will plan with their partner what should been done with the secret (i.e., *Establishing congruity in the boundary ownership)*. Individuals who have low trust in a partner might be more likely to use strategies that emphasize sanctions for breaking the rules regarding secrecy.

In spite of these limitations, the current study provides some valuable insight into how romantic partners convey their expectations regarding secrecy, why individuals engage in these discussions with partners, and how often individuals have these interactions with their romantic partners. Further study of how these discussions unfold will provide important information as to how managing secrecy may impact relational outcomes for romantic partners.

Table 1: Bivariate Correlations Among the Variables

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.
1. Relational length	--														
2. Freq. of contact	.09 205	--													
3. Dyadic trust	.11 206	.14* 206	--												
4. Willingness to keep a secret	.16* 205	.03 205	.02 207	--											
5. Frequency of discussing expectations	.13 206	.13 206	.05 208	-.08 207	--										
6. Number of secrets	-.03 206	-.03 206	-.21** 208	-.19** 207	.07 208	--									

Table 1 Continued

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.
7. Exposure	.05 205	.05 205	-.05 207	.75† 207	-.04 207	.23** 207	--								
8. Urgency important reason	.08 205	-.04 205	-.07 207	.83† 207	-.11 207	.24† 207	.67† 207	--							
9. Acceptance	.12 205	.02 205	.08 207	.68† 207	-.13 207	.06 207	.41† 207	.46† 207	--						
10. Never	-.11 205	.02 205	.06 207	-.53† 207	.02 207	-.25† 207	-.52† 207	-.61† 207	-.31† 207	--					
11.Relation security	.25† 205	.05 205	.26† 207	.69† 207	.04 207	.09 207	.36† 207	.42† 207	.46† 207	-.35† 207	--				
12. Permission	.07 203	-.06 203	-.05 205	.69† 205	-.04 205	.04 205	.33† 205	.46† 205	.42† 205	-.34† 205	.59† 205				
13. Intim. exchange	.18** 205	-.03 205	-.08 207	.65† 207	-.05 207	.11 207	.40† 207	.50† 207	.397† 207	-.34† 207	.34† 207	.39† 205	--		
14.Convers. appropriat.	.16* 205	-.09 205	-.03 207	.83† 207	.01 207	.16* 207	.56** 207	.64† 207	.54** 207	-.52† 207	.60† 207	.61† 205	.49† 207	--	
15. Help and comfort	.03 205	-.17* 205	.01 207	.62† 207	-.15* 207	.21** 207	.47† 207	.53† 207	.36† 207	-.37† 207	.28† 207	.31† 205	.52† 207	.45† 207	--
16. Family members.	.17* 202	.08 202	.12 204	.56† 204	-.02 204	.01 204	.31† 204	.38† 204	.29† 204	-.42† 204	.46† 204	.52† 202	.39† 204	.42† 204	.28† 204

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, † $p < .001$. All correlations reported at the two-tailed level.

Table 2: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Willingness to Keep a Secret from a Partner

Predictors	β	$F\Delta$	df	R^2	$R^2\ \Delta$
Willingness to keep a secret from a partner					
Step 1					
Relational length	.16*	5.09*	203	.02*	.02*
Step 2					
		.009	202	.03	.00
Relational length	.16*				
Trust	-.007				

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 3: Factor Analysis Examining the Underlying Dimensions of Individuals' Willingness to Keep a Secret from a Partner

Item assessing willingness	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X
Exposure (α = .94)										
I would tell my partner if he/she confronted me about the secret.	.82									
If my partner asked me about the secret I would tell him/her.	.79									
If my partner was going to discover the secret without me telling it I would go ahead and reveal the secret.	.79									
If my partner started quizzing me about the secret I would reveal it.	.78									
If my partner found out about the secret from someone else, I would tell.	.73									
I would tell my partner if I he/she questioned me directly.	.72									
I would tell my partner if I knew he/she was likely to find out the secret.	.69									
I would tell if it was inevitable that the secret would be revealed to him/her anyway.	.66									

Table 3: Continued

Item assessing willingness	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X
Urgency and important reason (α = .93)										
If the secret involved a problem and that problem got worse I would tell my partner.		.75								
If there was a pressing need for my partner to know the secret, I would tell.		.74								
I would tell my partner if I thought there was a really good reason for him/her to know the secret.		.71								
I would reveal the secret to my partner if the secret became a more critical concern than it is right now.		.70								
If a crisis arose that necessitated my revealing the secret to my partner I would tell.		.70								
If the secret involved a problem that was resolved and the problem began again I would tell.		.68								
I would tell my partner if I really needed to talk about the secret.		.64								
If the secret started causing more difficulties than it currently does, I would tell my partner.		.62								
If I couldn't hold in the secret any longer, I would reveal it to my partner.		.58								

Table 3: Continued

Item assessing willingness	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X
Acceptance (α = .94)										
If I knew that my partner would still accept me after hearing the secret I would tell.			.88							
I would reveal the secret to my partner if he/she wouldn't disapprove of me after hearing it.			.87							
If my partner wouldn't attack me about the secret I would tell.			.83							
I would tell my partner if I knew he/she wouldn't judge me.			.81							
Never (α = .95)										
No matter what I will keep the secret from my partner.				.85						
I would never tell my partner.				.84						
There is no chance I would ever reveal the secret to my partner.				.83						
There is nothing that would make me reveal the secret to my partner.				.79						
Relational security (α = .92)										
I would tell my partner if I had a more intimate relationship with him/her.					.87					
If I felt much closer to my partner I would tell the secret.					.85					
If I trusted my partner more than I do now I would reveal the secret.					.80					
If I knew my partner wouldn't tell the secret to others I would tell him/her.					.70					

Table 3: Continued

Item assessing willingness	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X
Permission (α = .83)										
If the person who is the focus of the secret died I would reveal the secret to my partner.						.74				
I would feel okay telling partner once a certain person in my family died.						.73				
I would tell my partner if someone in my family gave me permission to tell the secret.						.64				
I would tell my partner if my family members thought it was okay to tell.						.61				
Intimate exchange (α = .86)										
I would reveal the secret if my partner first told me a similar story about him/herself.							.82			
If my partner first disclosed something along the same lines I would reveal the secret.							.78			
If the secret involved a problem and my partner had a similar problem I would reveal the secret.							.77			
I would reveal the secret if I thought my partner needed to know he/she wasn't alone.							.64			

Table 3: Continued

Item assessing willingness	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X
Conversational appropriateness (α = .96)										
I would reveal the secret to my partner if it seemed to fit into the conversation.								.54		
I would tell the secret to my partner if we were discussing a subject related to the secret.								.52		
If the topic came up in conversation I would tell the secret to my partner.								.49		
If the secret was an appropriate conversational topic I would tell my partner.								.48		
Help and comfort (α = .85)										
I would tell if I thought knowing the secret would help my partner.									.81	
If I thought knowing the secret would comfort my partner I would tell.									.78	
Family membership (α = .95)										
I would reveal the secret to my partner if he/she were going to marry into my family.										.79
I would tell the secret to my partner if he/she somehow became a relative or family member.										.76

Note: The eigenvalues were: 19.59, 4.06, 2.54, 2.27, 1.99, 1.70, 1.32, 1.27, 1.09, 1.05, respectively.

Table 4: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Subscales of Willingness to Keep a Secret from a Partner

Predictors	β	$F\Delta$	df	R^2	$R^2\ \Delta$
Relational security					
Step 1					
Relational length	.22**	12.95***	203	.06***	.06***
Step 2					
		10.87***	202	.11**	.05**
Relational length	.22**				
Trust	.22**				
Intimate exchange					
Step 1					
Relational length	.19**	6.93**	203	.03**	.03**
Step 2					
		2.29	202	.04	.01
Relational length	.19**				
Trust	-.11				
Conversational appropriateness					
Step 1					
Relational length	.16*	5.28*	203	.03*	.03*
Step 2					
		.50	202	.03	.002
Relational length	.16*				
Trust`	-.05				

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 5: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Subscales of Willingness to Keep a Secret from a Partner

Predictors	β	$F\Delta$	df	R^2	$R^2\ \Delta$
Family membership					
Step 1					
Relational length	.16*	5.84*	200	.03*	.03*
Step 2					
		2.30	199	.04	.01
Relational length	.16*				
Trust	.11				
Help and comfort					
Step 1					
Frequency of contact	-.14	3.78*	204	.02	.02
Step 2					
		.18	203	.02	.001
Frequency of contact	-.14				
Trust	.03				

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 6: Summary of Regression Analysis Predicting Subscales of Willingness to Keep a Secret from a Partner

Predictors	β	F	df	R^2	R^2 Δ
	Exposure				
Trust	-.05	.48	205	.002	.002
	Urgency/important reason				
Trust	-.07	1.00	205	.005	.005
	Acceptance				
Trust	.08	1.27	205	.006	.006
	Never				
Trust	.06	.80	205	.004	.004
	Permission				
Trust	-.05	.46	203	.002	.002

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 7: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Trust

Predictors	β	$F\Delta$	df	R^2	$R^2\ \Delta$
Step 1					
Frequency of contact	.16*	5.50*	205	.03*	.03*
Step 2		.02	204	.03	.00
Frequency of contact	.16*				
Frequency of discussing expectations	.01				

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 8: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Willingness to Keep a Secret from a Partner

Predictors	β	$F\,\Delta$	df	R^2	$R^2\ \Delta$
Step 1					
Relational length	.16*	5.09*	203	.02*	.02*
Step 2					
		3.52	202	.04	.01
Relational length	.17*				
Frequency of discussing expectations	-.13				

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 9: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Subscales of Willingness to Keep a Secret from a Partner

Predictors	*B*	$F\Delta$	*df*	R^2	$R^2\ \Delta$
Relational security					
Step 1					
Relational length	.25***	12.95***	203	.06***	.06***
Step 2					
		.00	202	.06	.00
Relational length	.25***				
Freq. of discussing secrecy	.00				
Intimate exchange					
Step 1					
Relational length	.19**	6.93**	203	.03**	.03**
Step 2		1.36	202	.04	.006
Relational length	.19**				
Freq. of discussing secrecy	-.08				

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 10: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Subscales of Willingness to Keep a Secret from a Partner

Predictors	*B*	*F* Δ	*df*	R^2	R^2 Δ
Conversational appropriateness					
Step 1					
Relational length	.16*	5.28*	203	.03*	.03*
Step 2		.004	202	.03	.00
Relational length	.16*				
Freq. of discussing secrecy	-.005				
Family membership					
Step 1					
Relational length	.18*	5.84*	200	.03*	.03*
Step 2		.43	199	.03	.002
Relational length	.18*				
Freq. of discussing secrecy	-.05				
Help and comfort					
Step 1					
Frequency of contact	-.12	3.78	204	.02	.02
Step 2		4.34*	203	.04*	.02*
Relational length	-.12				
Freq. of discussing secrecy	-.14*				

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.

Table 11: Summary of Regression Analysis Predicting Subscales of Willingness to Keep a Secret from a Partner

Predictors	β	$F\Delta$	df	R^2	$R^2\ \Delta$
		Exposure			
Freq. of discussing secrecy	-.04	.28	205	.001	.001
		Urgency/important reason			
Freq. of discussing secrecy	-.11	2.38	205	.01	.01
		Acceptance			
Freq. of discussing secrecy	-.13	3.37	205	.02	.02
		Never			
Freq. of discussing secrecy	.02	.06	205	.001	.001
		Permission			
Freq. of discussing secrecy	-.04	.24	203	.001	.001

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 12: Categories, Examples, and Frequencies of Reasons For Discussing Expectations Regarding Secrecy with a Romantic Partner

Category Definition	Example	Frequency
To clarify expectations: To make expectations about the secret explicit.	With some things it is understood that it is okay to tell a few people and some things remain between he and I. We need to clarify what is what. (R154).	33 (15.9%)
To be on same page: To coordinate understanding to establish shared expectations about the secret.	We sometimes have different views of right and wrong…it is all about being on the same page and understanding each other's expectations (R69).	23 (11.1%)
To prevent disclosure to a target: To preclude disclosure to a particular individual.	If we don't discuss it, one of us may disclose to others information that needed to be kept a secret (R 74).	52 (25.0%)
To define the relational consequences of disclosure: To clarify how the relationship will be affected by the disclosure.	It is reassuring for myself to make sure we both mutually understand the consequences for me and for her about breaking confidentiality. If confidentiality was breached it would be a deal breaker for me (R10).	10 (4.8%)
To verify trust: To ensure that the partner is trustworthy.	Because the discussion allows use to come to an agreement of trust (R 161). It allows me to test his level of honesty at times (R152).	22 (10.6%)

Table 12: Continued

To establish boundaries associated with a shared network: To come to agreement or clarity about members of shared network who should/should not be told the secret.	It is a little complicated because his boss is also my father, so I have to be careful what I tell my parents out of respect for his possible job security (R14). We have the same best friends, so sometimes it is necessary to clarify that one of us doesn't want the other one to tell our friends about a private conversation. We both confide in the same people about our relationship (R44).	14 (6.7%)
To exercise complete openness: To be as open as possible with each other.	Secrecy between us promotes intimacy and trust… If he or I can be trusted to keep something to ourselves, then we feel close. It's a level of exclusivity—I trust you to know information that I keep from others (R75).	27 (13.0%)
To seek knowledge about the partner's secrecy: To gain knowledge about the partner's tendency to keep secrets.	I want to make sure he is telling me things that are necessary for me to know (R116). I discuss this in order to understand why we keep secrets from each other (R5).	4 (1.9%)
Never the case: The partners never discuss secrecy.	e.g. I never do this.	18 (8.7%)
Uncodable		5 (2.4%)

Table 13: Categories, Examples, and Frequencies of Reasons Against Discussing Expectations Regarding Secrecy with a Romantic Partner

Category Definition	Example	Frequency
Discussion is not necessary: The partners have established a relationship in which explicit discussion of expectations is not necessary.	It's already understood, and we trust each other—it falls under the pre-established ground rules (R154).	96 (46.2%)
The partners have not had the chance: The partners have not come across the opportunity to discuss expectations.	I don't think we are far enough into the relationship where we have had a lot of secrets, at least not time-wise (R35).	8 (3.8%)
The discussion would be awkward: The partners perceive discussing expectations as the type of conversation that would make them uncomfortable.	It can sometimes be inconvenient and bring up tension whenever the two of us discuss it. It is a sensitive subject for my girlfriend (R64).	11 (5.3%)
Fear of what might happen or be revealed: Partners have no desire to know the information or have the other partner know information that might be revealed about either partner during the discussion.	I never bring it up for fear that he might think I am doubting him (R 182). I don't want it to seem to my partner like a bigger, more scandalous secret than it is (R181).	8 (3.8%)
To allow autonomy in the relationship: Refraining from such discussions will allow freedom to partners in the relationship.	I still need some space from my girlfriend, so in instances where some detail about me would or should not influence the relationship, I think it is okay to keep at least some privacy (R23).	13 (6.3%)

Table 13: Continued

Still keeping secret from partner: A partner is continuing to keep the secret from the romantic partner.	I just don't want to talk about it because I have things I don't want to tell him, and I feel hypocritical if we talk about these expectations (R152).	15 (7.2%)
Avoid hurting others: To avoid hurting the partner or others.	Sometimes I guess I don't discuss secrets because I'd prefer not to tell her for fear of hurting her (R201).	4 (1.9%)
Low risk secret/partners not concerned: The secret is of little concern to the relational partner(s).	In this case it would not matter because the secrets will not harm anyone and can be told aloud (R139).	18 (8.7%)
Tried to discuss but it backfired: The partners have tried in the past to talk about their expectations/rules but it backfired and currently feel negativity about these discussions.	If we just had a long talk about it and I still feel insecure, I don't bring it up again (R3). She gets upset, and now I avoid the conversation altogether (R121).	2 (1%)
To avoid conflict: The partners will avoid the discussion so they do not start an argument.	Because sometimes it brings up conflict and makes us think about the future too much—when we should focus on where we are now (R78).	5 (2.4%)
Never the case: The partners always discuss expectations.	e.g. We always do this.	22 (10.6%)
Uncodable		6 (2.9%)

Note: Percentages do not add up to exactly 100% because of rounding.

Table 14: Categories, Examples, and Frequencies of Communicative Strategies in Secrecy Management Conversations

Definition	Example	Frequency			
		By Self [1]	By Partner [2]	By Both Partners [3]	Total Frequency [4]
Boundary linkages: Boundary linkages describe how individuals are privy to information—they are the connections that define why an individual is allowed to hear the secret. Linkages represent attempts by one partner to provide relational reasons for disclosing the secret to the other partner or managing secrecy.	I just wanted to tell you because it is a part of who I am and you are special to me (R137).	3 (2.9%)	9 (11.5%)	1 (11.1%)	14 (6.7%)
Boundary ownership: is defined as the process by which rules help determine the borders of the boundaries (Petronio, 2002 p. 105). Boundary ownership defines the rights and privileges individuals perceive that they have and other accord them as co-owners. Petronio (2002) provides three types of Boundary ownership. *Clarifying boundary ownership* – stating specifically who should or should not hear the secret.	He told me the people who could be told were immediate family members (sisters, brother), and the people who could not be told were outsiders (R20).	35 (34.3%)	25 (32.1%)	1 (11.1%)	64 (30.8%)
Defining the boundary ownership as not static—referring to time when explaining the logistics of disclosure.	He said "don't tell anyone until the next day" (R180).	7 (6.9%)	9 (11.5%)	1 (11.1%)	17 (8.2%)

Table 14: Continued

Establishing congruity in the boundary ownership—One or both partners attempts to get on the same page or get the story straight, plan what they will do with the secret.	We decided to set our standards of secrecy to include most events involving family and their troubles (R 23).	7 (6.9%)	6 (7.7%)	6 (66.7%)	19 (9.1%)
Prior restraint phrases: define the degree to which others have access to the secret and reflects how open or closed the boundaries to a secret are (Petronio & Bantz, 1991; Petronio, 2002).	Don't tell anyone because I know both parties very well (R139).	29 (28.4%)	19 (24.4%)	_	48 (23.1%)
Boundary sanctions: the method of holding a partner accountable for breaches or violations of boundaries (Petronio, 2002). *Sanctions for past disclosures:* One or both partners attempts to humiliate, point out faults, of the other partner's mistakes regarding past disclosures.	I confronted him and asked him, "Why did you tell your friend that I had been fighting a lot with my dad?" (R5). "Why the hell did you tell your mom that I thought I was pregnant?" (R77).	12 (11.8%)	7 (9%)	_	19 (9.1%)
Establishing sanctions: One or both partners attempts to establish or make explicit the consequences for violations of boundaries.	If you tell her, I'm never speaking to you again, I swear (R79).	7 (6.9%)	0 (0%)	_	7 (3.4%)
Uncodable	_	2 (2%)	3 (3.8%)	_	13 (6.3%)

Note: Percentages do not add up to exactly 100% because of rounding.
[1] Self-employed strategy n = 102
[2] Partner-employed strategy n = 78
[3] Both Partners equally employed strategy n = 9
[4] Total n = 208

Appendix A: IRB Consent Form

IRB APPROVED ON: 05-17-2010 *EXPIRES ON:* 05-16-2011
IRB PROTOCOL#
2008-10-0076

Title: An Investigation of the Associations between Secrecy Characteristics, Trust, and the Reasons for Discussing Expectations Regarding Secrets

Conducted By: Angela Niedermyer, Principle Investigator
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Telephone: 512-569-7466

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Of The University of Texas at Austin: Department: Dept. of Communication Studies
Telephone: 512-471-1921

Purpose: You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. The person in charge of this research will also describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and contact Angela Niedermyer, at ajniedermyer@mail.utexas.edu with anything that you don't understand before deciding whether or not to take part. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may stop participating at any time and your refusal will not impact current or future relationships with UT Austin or participating sites. To do so simply tell the researcher you wish to stop participation. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this consent form for your records.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how college students manage disclosures of secrets in close relationships. Specifically, we are interested in what partners may do in order to manage secrecy within their relationship.

If you agree to take part in this study, we will ask you to do the following:

Complete a questionnaire that asks about how much you trust your partner.
Complete a questionnaire that asks about your willingness to keep a secret from your partner.
Complete a questionnaire that asks about the number of secrets that you keep from your partner.
Complete a questionnaire that asks about how often you and your partner might discuss expectations about secrets.
Complete a questionnaire that asks about why you might or might not discuss expectations about secrets with your partner.
Complete a questionnaire that asks you to recall a secret that you are keeping from your partner.
Complete a questionnaire that asks you to recall and describe a conversation with your partner in which you managed secrecy.
Complete an information sheet that asks about demographic information about your relationship.

Total estimated time to participate in study is 50 minutes.
Risks of being in the study:

There is a slight risk of psychological or emotional stress due to completing items regarding trust within your relationships. If you wish to discuss the information above or any other risks you may experience, you may ask questions now or call the Principal Investigator listed on the front page of this form. In the event of your requiring psychological counseling, you are able to go to the fifth-floor of the Student Services Building on the UT campus to speak to a counselor at UT Counseling and Mental Health.

Benefits: The extent to which individuals trust their romantic partners and friends has important implications for how they manage secrecy in their relationships. This study will contribute to an increased understanding of why partners keep secrets from each other and why individuals may choose to discuss rules and expectations regarding the secrets they share with a partner.

Compensation:
You will receive no more than 3% of your total final grade in extra credit toward your course grade in your communication studies course. You may sign up for a different extra credit study as an alternative if you choose not to participate in the current study.

Confidentiality and Privacy Protections:
The data resulting from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed with in this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate you with it, or with your participation in any study.

The records associated with this study will be stored securely and kept private. Authorized persons from The University of Texas at Austin, members of the Institutional Review Board, and (study sponsors, if any) have the legal right to review your research records and will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. All publications will exclude any information that will make it possible to identify you as a subject. Throughout the study, the researcher will notify you of new information that may become available and that might affect your decision to remain in the study.

Contacts and Questions:
If you have any questions about the study please ask now. If you have questions later or want additional information, call the researchers conducting the study. Their names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses are at the top of this page. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, complaints, concerns, or questions about the research please contact Jody Jensen, Ph.D., Chair of The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, (512) 232-2685, irbchair@austin.utexas.edu or the Office of Research Support at (512) 471-8871 or email: orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

CONSENT FORM 2

IRB APPROVED ON: *EXPIRES ON:*

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and have sufficient information to make a decision about participating in this study. I consent to participate in this study.

Signature:_____ Date: _____

_____ Date: _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Signature of Investigator: _____Date: _____

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Appendix B: Questionnaire

The purpose of the study is to:

-explore how individuals in romantic relationships keep secrets from partners,

-examine how partners manage expectations regarding secrecy about the secrets that they keep from others, and

-assess individuals' trust in their romantic partner.

First, I'd like to know a little about you.

Age:

_____

Sex:
Male
Female

Please indicate by circling your ethnicity:
Caucasian/White
Black/African American
Hispanic/Latino/a
Asian/Pacific Islander
Other

How long have you been in this relationship with your romantic partner? (Answer in years and months). _____Years _____Months

Circle the one situation that most accurately reflects the current relationship status with your romantic partner. Are you:

casually dating exclusively dating engaged married

Are you currently living with this partner? (circle one) Yes/No

How often do you see/have contact with this romantic partner?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all Frequently

How many days out of the week do you see or have contact with this romantic partner?

What is the sex of your romantic partner? (circle one)

Male

Female

When answering the following questions, think of the relationship that you currently have with the romantic partner you noted above.

Indicate on a scale of 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree) after reading each statement about your partner.

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
My partner is primarily interested in his/her own welfare.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
There are times when my partner cannot be trusted.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My partner is perfectly honest and truthful with me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel that I can trust my partner completely.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My partner is truly sincere in his/her promises.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel that my partner does not show me enough consideration.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My partner treats me fairly and justly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel that my partner can be counted on to help me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sometimes partners decide to keep information from each other. This is called secrecy. For the purpose of this study, a secret is any information that you *intentionally* block from a partner. The secrets you keep can be positive or negative.

When answering the following questions, think of the relationship that you currently have with your romantic partner.

How often do you keep secrets from your partner?

Never			Sometimes		Always	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Think of other romantic couples you know. Would you say that you keep fewer or more secrets from your partner than other individuals might keep from their romantic partners? Indicate 1 (Much Fewer) to 7 (Much More).

Much Fewer			About the same		Much More	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

How many secrets that you would consider important, are you currently keeping from your partner? If you are not sure please give an approximate number.

_____

In this section, we would like you to recall and describe one important secret that you are currently keeping from your partner. This secret can be positive or negative. Be sure to describe what the secret is about.

Why are you keeping this secret?

Think again about the secret that you just described. This secret should be the one that you noted above.
For each of the following, indicate from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) the extent to which you agree with each statement.

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
If the secret involved a problem and my partner had a similar problem, I would reveal the secret.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would reveal the secret if I thought my partner **needed to know he/she wasn't "alone."**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would reveal the secret if my partner first told me a similar story about him/herself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If I thought knowing the secret would comfort my partner, I would tell.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If my partner first disclosed something along the same lines, I would reveal the secret.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would tell if I thought knowing the secret would help my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If my partner and I were having a really intimate conversation, I would tell.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would tell **if my partner and I were having a 'heart to heart' discussion.**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would tell my partner if it was inevitable that the secret would be revealed to him/her anyway.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
I would tell my partner about the secret it he/she questioned me directly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would tell my partner if I knew he/she was likely to find out the secret.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would tell my partner if he/she confronted me about the secret.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If my partner found out about the secret from someone else, I would tell.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If my partner started quizzing me about the secret, I would reveal it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If my partner was going to discover the secret without me telling it, I would go ahead and reveal the secret.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If my partner asked me about the secret, I would tell him/her.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would reveal the secret to my partner if the secret became a more critical concern than it is right now.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If the secret involved a problem, and that problem got worse, I would tell my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If the secret involved a problem that was resolved, and the problem began again, I would tell my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would tell my partner if I really needed to talk about the secret.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If I couldn't hold in the secret any longer, I would reveal it to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
I would tell my partner if I needed someone to confide in.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If I thought my partner was the only one I could talk to, I would tell him/her the secret.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If the secret started causing more difficulties than it currently does, I would tell my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
There is no chance I would ever reveal the secret to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would never tell my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No matter what, I will keep the secret from my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
There is nothing that would make me reveal the secret to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would reveal the secret to my partner if he/she **wouldn't disapprove of me after** hearing it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If I knew my partner would still accept me after hearing the secret I would tell.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If my partner wouldn't attack me about the secret, I would tell.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would tell my partner if I knew he/she wouldn**'t** judge me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would reveal the secret to my partner if it seemed to fit into the conversation.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If the secret was an appropriate conversational topic, I would tell my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
I would tell the secret to my partner if we were discussing a subject related to the secret.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If the topic came up in conversation, I would tell the secret to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If I trusted my partner more than I do now I would reveal the secret.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would tell my partner if I had a more intimate relationship with him/her.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If I felt much closer to my partner I would tell the secret.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If I knew my partner wouldn't tell the secret to others, I would tell him/her.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If a crisis arose that necessitated my revealing the secret to my partner, I would tell.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If there was a pressing need for my partner to know the secret, I would tell.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would tell my partner if I thought there was a really good reason for him/her to know the secret.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would tell my partner if my family members thought it was okay to tell.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would tell my partner if someone in my family gave me permission to tell the secret.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
If the person who is the focus of the secret died, I would reveal the secret to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would feel okay telling my partner once a certain person in my family died.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would reveal the secret to my partner if he/she were going to marry into my family.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would tell the secret to my partner if he/she somehow became a relative or family member.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Romantic partners sometimes decide to talk about what they expect each other to do with information that they don't want spread to others outside of the relationship.

For the purpose of this study, a discussion between partners about secrecy expectations is any discussion that you have with your partner that includes:

- Talking about who should/shouldn't be allowed to hear secrets
- Talking about rules you or your partner may have regarding privacy or secrecy.

We are interested in how often you might talk with your partner about managing secrets.

On a scale of 1 (Never) to 7 (Always) indicate how often you have the following types of conversations with your partner.

	Never		Sometimes				Always
How often do you discuss your secrecy expectations with your partner?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My partner and I talk about whether we expect certain information that we tell each other should be kept secret from others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My partner and I talk about our rules about keeping secrets when we share a secret with each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My partner and I tell each other who should or should not be told our secrets.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

We are interested in why you might or might not talk with your partner about managing secrets. *In instances in which you DO discuss* your/your partner's expectations about secrecy, answer the following question:

Describe why you do discuss with your partner expectations that you/your partner have about secrecy:

In instances in which you DO NOT discuss your/your partner's expectations about secrecy, answer the following question:

Describe why you do not discuss with your partner expectations that you/your partner have about secrecy:

Sometimes these discussions about secrecy management are an opportunity for partners to tell each other who should or shouldn't be allowed to hear the secret.

In instances in which you DO discuss who should or shouldn't be allowed to hear your or your partner's secrets, answer the following question:

Describe why you do **discuss with your partner who should or shouldn't be allowed to hear your/your partner's secrets:**

In instances in which you DO NOT discuss your expectations with your partner, answer the following question:

Describe why you do not **discuss with your partner who should or shouldn't be allowed to hear your/your partner's secrets:**

Think of a conversation you may have had with your partner when you or your partner discussed expectations about secrecy or who should or should not be told a **secret. We'd like you to recreate that conve**rsation in the space provided below.

Describe more fully the location that this conversation took place.

Describe more fully what happened before the conversation took place.

Describe more fully what happened after the conversation took place.

This concludes the questionnaire. Please hand the questionnaire to the researcher. Make sure that you have removed the first page (consent form) and signed the sheet at the front of the room to ensure that you receive extra credit for your CMS class.

Thank you!

Appendix C: Recruitment Flier

Extra Credit Study

Title: An investigation of the associations between secrecy characteristics, trust, and expectations regarding secrets

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to explore how individuals in close relationships keep secrets from partners, examine how partners manage expectations regarding secrecy, and assess individuals' trust in their partner. Participation involves completing a 50-minute survey.

To be eligible for the study participants must either currently be in a friendship or romantic relationship, and be 18 years old or older.

For your participation, you will receive extra credit for one CMS course. Your instructor will determine the amount of extra credit. *If you have questions about the exact amount of extra credit you will earn, please contact your instructor prior to completing the survey.*

To participate, please sign up for a time slot by going to the 7th floor of the CMA building. The sign up sheet is posted in the hallway of the 7th floor near the Communication Studies Main Office (CMA 7.114).

If you have any questions, please contact Angela Niedermyer at ajniedermyer@mail.utexas.edu or 512-569-7466.

Thank you!

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